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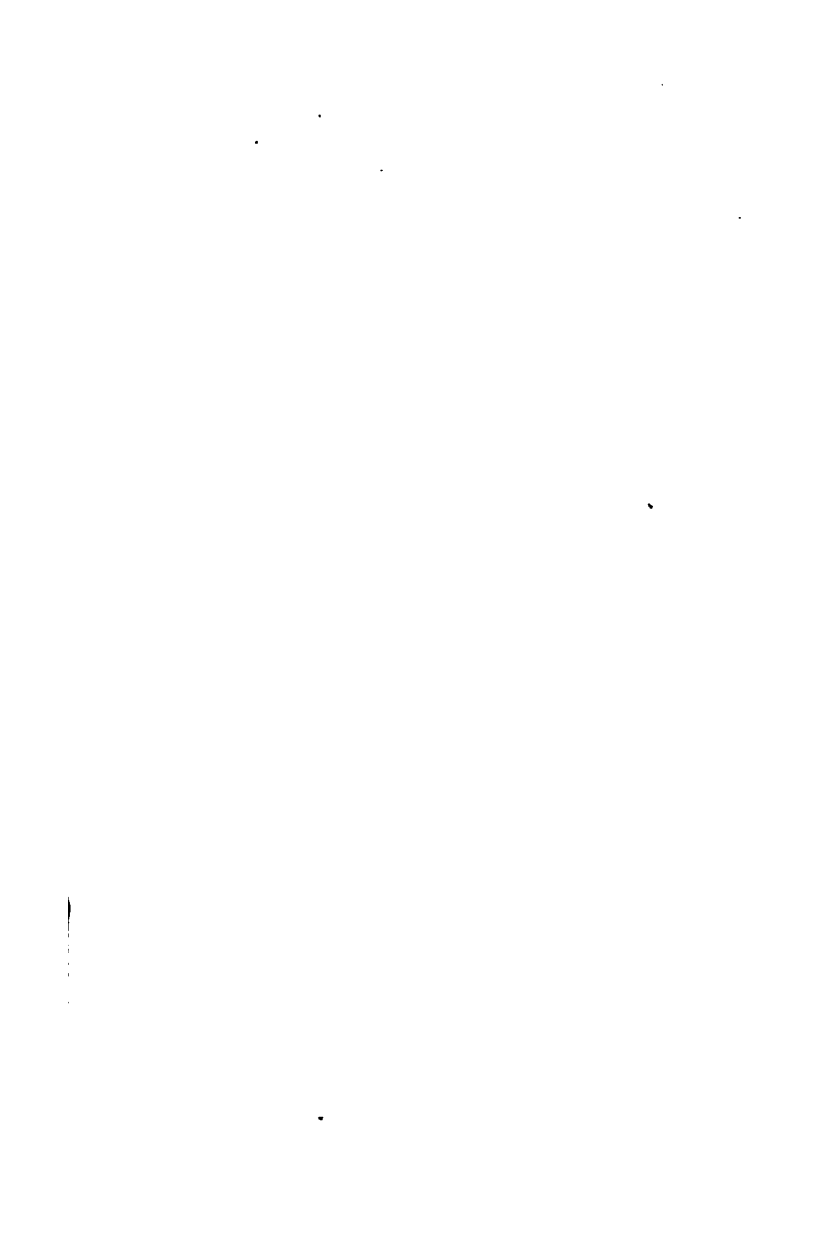
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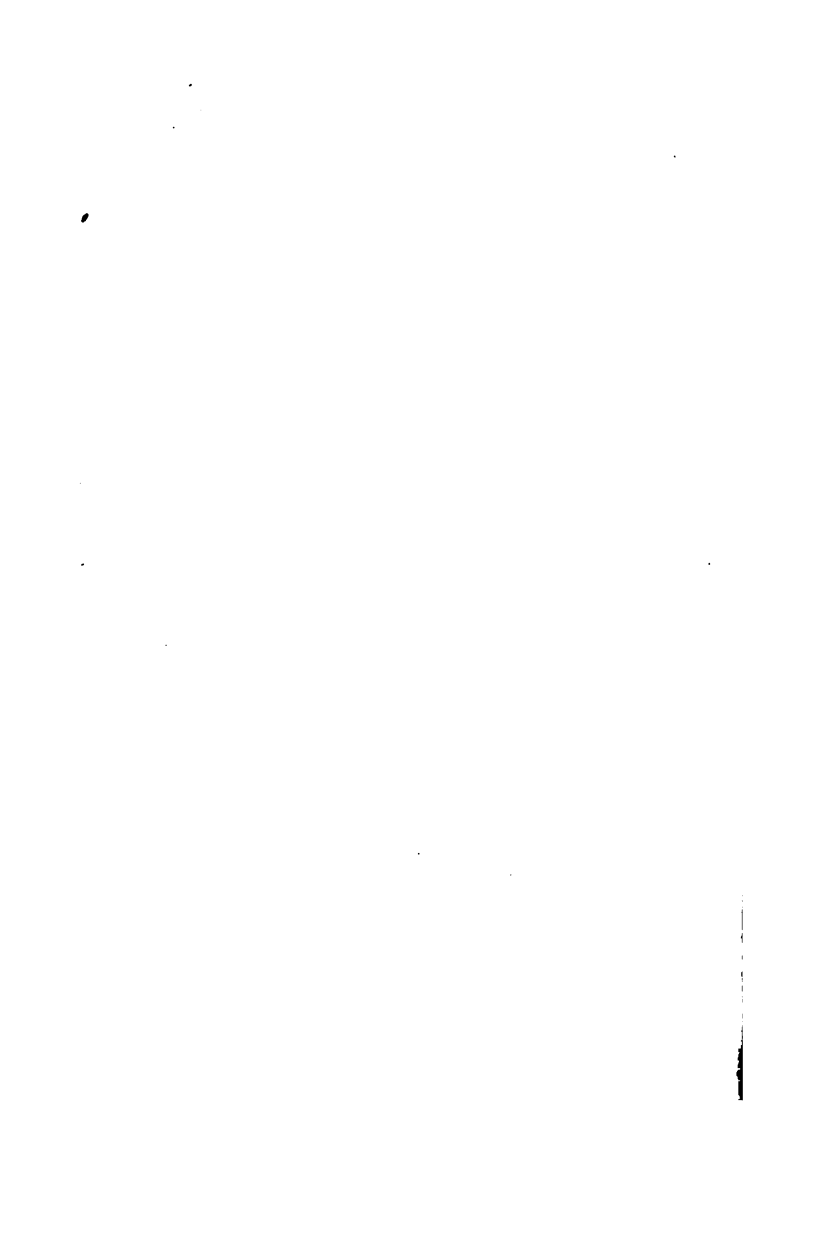


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HELEN'S FAULT;

A TALE FOR THE YOUNG.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

ADELAIDE LINDSAY.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:

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HELEN'S FAULT.

PART I.

THE MOSS HUT.

CHAPTER I.

"OH, dear Aunt Eleanor," cried Helen, running one morning into Mrs. Thornton's room; "it is such a lovely day,—and we finished the hut in the wood yesterday, and we want so much to go and play in it,—need we do our lessons this morning?"

Mrs. Thornton was standing before her glass finishing her dressing, for it was not much past eight o'clock.

"No, you need not," she said.

"But must we do them in the afternoon? it will be the best part of the day," said Helen; "it will be *so* tiresome to have to leave our play when we have got quite into

it. Dear Aunt Eleanor!" in a most beseeching tone, "mayn't we have a whole holiday this once—just this once!"

Aunt Eleanor looked rather grave. Her maid saw her face in the glass, as she stood behind her fastening her dress; but Helen did not.

"Yes, my dear," she said, "I will allow you to have a whole holiday."

"Thank you, thank you, darling Aunt Eleanor," cried Helen, clapping her hands. She ran towards the door, and then came back again to the dressing-table.

"Aunt Eleanor," she said, "we mean to have a feast in our hut,—a feast for a housewarming, Maurice says. May we ask Mrs. Hudson to let us have two cheesecakes—two little cheesecakes, Aunt Eleanor?"

"You may, my dear."

"Or may we have four?—it will be only one a-piece."

"Very well."

"And might we have a few strawberries,—just a few,—and a spoonful of white sugar, and Mary's doll's jug full of cream?"

"Yes, Helen, you may. What else do you wish for?"

"Oh, if you would be so very good as to let us have a tiny bit of meat for the top-dish, it would be so nice. It would look like a real dinner. May we have a piece of meat?"

Mrs. Thornton sat down. She had finished dressing. She took Helen's hand, and drew her towards her.

"In short, Helen," she said, "you want a dish of cheesecakes, and a dish of strawberries, and a dish of meat,—and cream and sugar, and anything else you can get."

"It will look very bad to have only *one* side-dish, will it not, Aunt Eleanor?"

"And you would like to have a tartlet or a custard for the second, you mean?"

"Oh yes; that would be delightful!"

"My dear Helen, there is no harm in your wishing to have all these things, and no harm in your asking for them; but I should be much better pleased, if you would make your requests in a more straightforward manner. I do not at all like this way

you have of trying to get what you want little by little. It is not quite open,—not *quite* honest, my dear.”

Helen blushed up to the eyes, and hung down her head. Two or three tears rolled down her cheek.

“I am not angry with you, my love,” said her kind aunt. “But do not you think it would have been much better if you had said at once, ‘Aunt Eleanor, may we have a whole holiday, and may we have a feast,’ instead of asking, as you did, first for half a holiday, then for a whole; then for two cheesecakes, then for four; and so on. Do not you think so, Helen?”

Helen made no reply, but looked the picture of confusion, while her tears began to fall faster. She could never bear the least blame. She cared much less for *doing* what was wrong, than for being *found fault with* for doing what was wrong; provided she could escape the blame, she did not much trouble herself about the action. This was a very sad defect.

"Now, Helen, you need not cry any more," said Mrs. Thornton, drying the little girl's eyes with her pocket-handkerchief; "you have done nothing very wrong this time;—the next time you come to beg for anything, let me know what you want at once—that is all. If you would make a resolution to try to do this, it would be much better than crying. And now run away; I will send word to Mrs. Hudson what you are to have for your feast."

Helen walked from the room,—she did not run this time. She waited a little to recover herself, and then went down stairs to the schoolroom.

CHAPTER II.

"WELL, Helen, may we?" exclaimed her cousins, Mary and Maurice, as she opened the schoolroom door.

"Oh, no, I see we mayn't," cried Maurice, in a tone of vexation, as he looked at her

face, which still bore traces of tears. "How tiresome!"

"Aunt Eleanor says we may have a holiday," said Helen.

Maurice danced about the room, and flung the lesson-book, from which he had been learning, up to the ceiling. Then stopping short in the middle of his ecstasy, he said,

"Then what has been the matter, Nelly? Something has, I can see by your eyes."

"Oh, nothing, nothing," said Helen hastily.

"Something has, though," said Mary. "Do tell us, Nelly dear!"

"Indeed, it's nothing. I wish you would not tease so, Mary."

Mary had no intention of teasing, so she made no further inquiries as to the cause of her cousin's red eyes, and Helen continued:

"Aunt Eleanor says we may have a whole—whole holiday; and we may have a feast; and Mrs. Hudson is to give us cheesecakes, and strawberries, and meat, and cream, and

sugar, and tartlets, and custards, and all sorts of things."

"Oh, what a grand feast we shall have!" cried Maurice. "Are we really to have all that, though? Did mamma say so? Why, we shall hardly have room enough upon the table for our dinner. It will be a lord mayor's show—feast, I mean. Let me see," and he began counting upon his fingers; "meat, one; cheesecakes, two; strawberries, three; tartlets, four; custards——"

"Oh, perhaps we shall not have both tartlets and custards," interrupted Helen.

"Why you said so," said Maurice, "and all sorts of things besides."

"Well, cream and sugar," said Helen.

"I declare you said *besides* cream and sugar. Now did she not, Mary?" appealing to his sister.

"I thought so, certainly," replied Mary.

"I wish you would not exaggerate so, Helen," cried Maurice, pettishly. "You always do exaggerate so much. I dare say we are to have nothing after all but

an old dry crust, and two or three strawberries."

"What nonsense you talk! But you are always so particular, Maurice. If I say the least little bit more than is quite exact, you always say I exaggerate so; and I am sure it can't matter a bit."

"Well, mamma says it does; and that we may get into a habit of being careless about truth, by saying a little too much in the sort of way you do."

"Or by saying a little too little," added Mary.

"Well, I am sure I did not mean to tell an untruth; and it is very hard that you should call me a story-teller just because I said, 'custards and all sorts of things.'"

"There you are,—at it again," cried Maurice.

"He never said you were a story-teller, Helen, indeed," said Mary.

"But he meant it, though; and that is just as bad." And Helen's tears began to flow again.

"Indeed, I never meant any such thing, Nelly," said Maurice; "so don't cry, there's a good girl. We shall have our happy day quite spoilt. Now do smile again, and I won't even say that you exaggerate."

Helen dried her eyes, and the little party were soon as merry and as in great good humour as if no little disagreement had happened.

The nursery-maid now came in with rather a large basket in her hand.

"Mrs. Hudson has put everything into this basket, Miss Mary, that your mamma said you were to have for your feast."

"Oh, what a famous basket," cried Maurice, running up to Martha. "I wonder if it it's full—I wonder what we've got?" and he seized hold of the handle of the lid.

"Oh, don't, Maurice!" exclaimed Mary and Helen at once. "Martha, don't let him. It will spoil all the pleasure if we know beforehand. It will be so nice to unpack the basket at the hut. It will be just as if you were to come in from hunting,

Maurice, and we did not know what you would bring us for dinner, till we looked into your game-bag, as we do when papa comes in from shooting."

"Very well—very well; I won't look," said good-natured Maurice, shutting down the lid. "But I saw—what do you think I saw?"

"Oh, tell us!" cried Helen.

"And a minute ago you did not want me even to look. I am not going to tell you."

"Oh, no," said Mary, "don't tell. We shall soon know, Helen."

"Yes, we shall soon know," replied Helen, dancing about.

"And now what are we waiting for? Oh, Mary, don't you think it would be very nice if we were to write a little letter to invite Aunt Eleanor to come to our feast?"

"What a good thought!" exclaimed Mary. "Oh, yes, let us."

"You must write it, then, because you write so much better than I do," said Helen.

"Very well." And Mary sat down to write.

"What must I say? Maurice—Helen—just tell me."

"Oh, you must begin—Stay a moment; what shall our names be? We must not be Maurice, and Helen, and Mary—that will be so very stupid."

"Oh, I'll be the Black Prince!" cried Maurice.

"Oh, Maurice, how ridiculous!" exclaimed Helen, contemptuously; whilst Mary burst out laughing at the pompous manner in which he announced his determination. "What can the Black Prince have to do with a hut in the wood?"

"Then I'll be Alexander Selkirk."

"And what are we to be? Alexander Selkirk was quite alone on the desert island."

"Oh, you may be my two cats. He had two cats, I think; or at all events, he might have had."

"I dare say," said Mary, laughing again.

"Very nice for you, Mr. Alexander; but I

suppose you would not ask your cats to sit down to dinner with you, and we should get none of the feast."

"Oh, yes, you would. Alexander Selkirk and Robinson Crusoe were always very polite to their dumb animals; because, you know, there was no one else for them to speak to. I promise to give you something to eat, poor pussies."

"I won't be a poor pussy," cried Helen; "or, if I am, I will be the White Cat in the Fairy Tales; and you may be the Prince, Maurice, and Mary, my confidant."

"I dare say,—and you to be the mistress of the whole thing, then!" returned Maurice.

"Well, please settle something," said Mary, who had been sitting all this time at her desk, with a piece of her best note-paper open before her, and a pen in her hand; "we shall never get out to-day!"

"Oh, I can't!" cried Maurice, pettishly, throwing himself into a chair; "Helen objects to everything."

"Because you choose such absurd names!" exclaimed Helen.

"Oh—well then—call me Mr. Hopkins, or anything; I don't care."

"Suppose," said Mary, "that you were to be Robin Hood, Maurice?"

"Oh, yes; Robin Hood, of course!" cried Maurice, springing from his chair; "of course, Robin Hood. How stupid not to have thought of him before."

"And what am I to be?" asked Helen, in a piteous voice.

"You can be Little John, you know; and I will be Friar Tuck."

"Oh, that will be charming!" cried Helen, clapping her hands with delight. "Now, Mary, make haste."

"Well, what ought I to say? How do grown-up people write invitations?"

"Oh, you must use some grand words! you must say something about entreating—and felicity—and beneficence, or munificence—which is it? and great gratitude—and company to dinner. Something of that sort."

Mary wrote.

"Shall I read what I have written?" asked she, when she had finished.

"Oh, yes; of course."

Mary began:—

"Robin Hood, and Little John, and Friar Tuck, request and entreat mamma will have the munificence to be so good as to give them the felicity of her company to dinner, in their hut in the wood."

"Will that do?" she asked.

"Oh," said Helen, "you should not have put 'mamma,' Mary; that looks so—so—I don't know what; you should have written 'Mrs. Thornton;' or stay—the 'Lady,' as it always is in the ballad books, the 'Lady' Thornton, or the 'Lady' Eleanor."

"Lady Eleanor—that sounds very pretty; I will write it over again," said Mary.

"Stop," cried Maurice, who had been reading over Mary's composition; "you have never said at what o'clock; and I don't like the 'hut in the wood;' it is almost as bad as 'mamma.'"

"What am I to call it, then?" asked Mary.

"You must say at the 'Trysting tree,' as it is called in *Ivanhoe*, and the *Ballada*."

Mary soon accomplished a second note, with the desired alterations. It was sealed, and directed in full, with due ceremony, and handed to Martha, who had been standing by, much amused, the whole time of the discussion, with most particular injunctions by no means to forget to deliver it.

And now the two little girls put on their bonnets, Maurice seized his straw hat, and they went through the open glass-door into the garden. It was a lovely June day. There was not a cloud to be seen on the deep-blue sky. The birds were singing cheerily, and a gentle breeze, that stirred the leaves of the trees, prevented it from being too hot. It was not much past nine o'clock.

Mary and Helen carried the basket between them; for Maurice, good-natured as he was in general, did not offer to help them.

Indeed, it never came into his head to do so, as certainly it would have done if he had thought more of other people's convenience and less of his own pleasure; but he liked to run backwards and forwards, and to leap over the flower-beds, brandishing a long rod, which he called his lance, and fancying himself a gallant knight upon a spirited steed; and if he had carried the basket, he would not have been able to do this.

The wood where the hut was lay at the other side of the flower-garden, and it was not long before the children reached it.

Maurice had galloped on first, and stood at the little gate which opened into the wood, waiting, as the two girls came up.

"How slow you are!" he cried; "we have got so much to do. We must get fern for seats, and find a large stone for a table, and I don't know what besides; and you two girls creep on as if you were mounted upon donkeys. My noble war-horse has been waiting this age, tearing up the ground with impatience."

And Maurice jumped about, snorting and pawing the ground with his foot, in imitation of the horse upon which he fancied himself mounted.

"Oh, this basket is so heavy!" exclaimed Mary; "let us put it down, and rest a little, Helen."

"Rest? what stuff!" cried Maurice. "Come, come, little donkeys, move on."

"No, we won't till we've rested," said Helen. "It's all very well for you, Maurice, who have had no heavy basket to carry."

"Heavy? What nonsense!" replied he, laughing, and seizing hold of the basket; "Why, it's as light as a feather!"

"I wish you would carry it yourself, then," said Helen.

"So I would, only you see I am mounted upon my noble steed; and see how he kicks at the very idea of being made a pack-horse of!" and Maurice kicked, and plunged, and snorted afresh.

"Now do, dear Maurice," said Mary,

"let us rest in peace for a minute, and we will go on directly."

"Very well ; you are a good little donkey, you, Mary ; but as for this other one, I don't know what to say about her. I think she must have no hay for her supper. Eh, little donkey?" and he went up to Helen, and patted her head.

"Oh, I am very good, too;" she replied ; "but you always praise Mary, and never me. Come, Mary, I am quite rested ; are you?"

Mary was quite rested, she said, and on they went again. And now, whilst the children are walking through that pretty wood to their hut, it must be told who Helen was, and how she came to be living with her cousins.

Helen's mamma was sister to Mrs. Thornton. She had married an officer, and gone with him to India almost immediately afterwards. There Helen was born, and there she had lived with her parents till she was nearly eight years old. It then became necessary

to send her to England, for few children can stand the Indian climate after they reach that age. Little Helen's health began to fail, and Captain and Mrs. Grey were obliged to part from her, to their great sorrow, and send her to her aunt Eleanor, who had kindly offered to take charge of her, and bring her up with her own children. Helen had no brothers or sisters of her own. Poor little Helen felt very lonely and desolate when her papa and mamma kissed her for the last time, and left the ship which was to take her to England. She cried very bitterly, and it was a long time before Mrs. Simpson, the lady who had promised to take care of her during the voyage, could succeed in comforting her.

There were several children on board the ship about her own age, and in a few days Helen became as gay as ever again. As she was a lively, pretty child, everybody was very good-natured to her, and she was made a great pet of, much indulged, and never found fault with. Mrs. Simpson, her

mamma's friend, was very ill almost the whole time of the voyage, and quite unable to pay much attention to her charge. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Helen became rather spoilt. She liked to be flattered and caressed by the gentlemen and ladies on board, and she liked to be left to amuse herself as she pleased, and to have no one to make her do her lessons with regularity. She had never been a very diligent child, and now she grew very idle, and very thoughtless, and vain also; and because there was no one kind enough and sensible enough to take the trouble to correct her when she was naughty or silly, she began to think that she had no faults at all.

She had a way, too, of saying lively things which sounded much more clever than they really were; and when she found that this was admired and made people laugh, she became by degrees careless about the exact truth of what she said; and if she did not invent, at least she very much exaggerated any little relation she happened to make,

because it made it sound so much more amusing,

At last the ship reached England, and Mr. Thornton now came on board to fetch his little niece, and take her to his house in the country, which was to be her home for the future. She had not been settled there very long before her aunt Eleanor began to perceive many little things in her conduct of which she could not approve. She was much too kind and too excellent a person to allow them to pass by unnoticed, but plainly and gently pointed out to the little girl where she was wrong. This was a great mortification to Helen, who had begun, as it has been said, to fancy that she had not a fault in the world. She cried bitterly because she found her aunt Eleanor did not think so, but she made no serious purposes of amendment. She only took care not to repeat the fault in her aunt's presence. She forgot that there is One who can see everywhere, and who knows every thought of the heart; if she had not forgotten this, she would also have

been more attentive to her prayers. These had become very much neglected, and though she never failed night and morning to kneel down and repeat the prayers her mamma had taught her, yet her thoughts were far away. She repeated the words without the least attention, hardly even knowing what she said, and never thinking whom she was pretending to address.

Maurice and Mary, Mrs. Thornton's two oldest children, soon became very fond of their sprightly, good-natured little cousin, and Helen, who was very affectionate, loved them very much in return. Maurice was eleven years old, Mary a few months younger than Helen. Mrs. Thornton had, besides, two other children a good deal younger than Maurice and Mary, the eldest of them being only four years old. And now, I think we may go back to the wood and the three children and the hut, which by this time they have reached.

CHAPTER III.

A PRETTY little sparkling rivulet ran through one part of the wood, and upon the bank on the other side of this rivulet the children had built their hut, standing a little back under a large oak-tree. A narrow bridge, made of two planks joined together, with a hand-rail on each side, crossed the rivulet opposite to it. This was one of the attractions which had made our three children choose this spot before any other. They thought it very charming to run over this bridge, which, though quite safe, was so slight that it swayed backwards and forwards when any one crossed it. Maurice called the rivulet his moat, and the bridge the drawbridge. He would have given a good deal to have been able to make it into a real drawbridge, but this was quite beyond his powers, so he was obliged to content himself with fancying it such. A little way

behind the hut, and surrounding it at a little distance, were some tolerably high rocks; birch-trees, wild roses, blackberries, and the foxglove, with its tall, handsome pink flowers, grew in profusion from these stones, nearly hiding them in some places, whilst in others they stood out in large pieces. There were stone steps cut in one place up this rock, which led to the top, and so into the wood again. You can fancy now how the hut stood, upon a plot of fine soft moss, which in spring was quite bright with the blue hyacinth and delicate white anemone. In front of it was the rivulet, and on every other side, at a little distance off, were these pretty rocks. There was no way of getting to it but across the bridge or down the rock-steps, without wading through the water, for the rocks stretched round to the rivulet on both sides of the hut. The hut was made of good strong stakes, driven into the ground, and bound together at the top. These stakes were joined together on the sides by *wattles*, as they are called. Wattles are slighter

sticks, which bend easily, and are woven in and out, making a kind of basket-work, only very coarse. The children had not done much of this work; they had had the gardener's boy to help them. He had driven in the stakes with a mallet or wooden hammer, after first pointing them at one end with his bill-hook, to make them go more easily into the ground, and he had woven in the wattles; but Maurice and the two girls had collected the moss, and stuffed it into the spaces left by the wattles. It had taken a great deal of moss, and a great deal of time and trouble; for at first, till they got expert by practice, the moss would tumble out as fast as they put it on; and the birds, too, came and pilfered it for their nests, so it had taken a great many days before it was finished. Now, however, it looked very pretty, neat, and snug, and rather like a bird's nest itself. I must not forget to say, that there was a doorway, though no door, and a small, square hole for a window, with no window in it.

"How pretty and nice it looks," cried Helen, "quite like a real hut; doesn't it?"

"To be sure it does," returned Maurice; "and I should think it was a real one, too! Oh, how nice it is to gallop over this bridge. Oh, how I wish it were a real drawbridge; and then we could pull it up when we had got across, and nobody could come near us! I would call it my castle, then."

"You forget the steps," said Mary.

"Ah, to be sure, those steps! but you know we might defend them."

"Oh, Maurice, you are so full of your knights, and your castles, and your war-horses and drawbridges, there is no getting you to do anything!" exclaimed Helen. "You are Robin Hood now, remember, and have nothing to do with all that;—now just cross the bridge, there's a dear boy, and let Mary and me pass."

Maurice moved on, and in the next minute all three stood on the grass before the hut. Maurice was the first to run in. "Oh, Mary! Helen!" he cried, "look here—

see here ! Just the very things we wanted to make us complete ! A table, and two—three—four little stools, I declare.”

“ Oh, how delightful ! Oh, what a lovely little table ! Oh, who can have put them in ? ” cried the two girls, with one voice.

There, in the middle of the hut, indeed, stood a pretty little low table in what is called rustic work, and there were four stools to match. The delight of the children was unbounded. “ Who can have done it ?—are they really for us ?—darling little table ! ” was repeated over and over again.

“ I have thought of such a nice plan,” cried Helen, when the delight had a little subsided ; “ let us get a great quantity of foxgloves, and make a kind of wreath round the doorway,—would not that look very pretty ? ”

“ Oh, Helen, you always have such pretty plans ! ” said Mary. “ Oh, yes, let us do it, Maurice.”

“ It will look like a triumphal arch ! ” cried Maurice, who was reading the Roman

history with his mother. "It will be capital!"

"Well, then, we must all set to work and gather as fast as we can," said Helen, leading the way to the rocks.

Mary and Maurice followed, and they had soon each gathered large handfulls of the beautiful flowers. Then with some rushes, which grew in quantities a little lower down the stream, they bound the long stiff stalks together, taking care not to knock off or injure the blossoms, till they had made three rods of foxglove, as it were; one for each side of the doorway, and one to be bent in an arch over the top.

"Now, Maurice, have you your ball of string in your pocket?" asked Helen, when they had finished. "We must tie on our wreaths to the stakes. How pretty they do look!"

Maurice produced some string and a knife, and with the assistance of the two little girls, fastened the flowers into their proper places. They then stood back a few

paces to admire their handiwork. It certainly did look very pretty.

"Oh, I hope mamma will come before they are all withered!" said Mary. "I should so like her to see them, just as they look now,—so fresh and pink. What o'clock is it, Maurice, do you think?"

"I can't tell a bit; but I am sure we must have been here an hour and a half at least."

"Oh, more than that, Maurice, a great, great deal more!" exclaimed Helen. "Only just think how long it took us to gather the foxglove; and hours, I am sure, hours, to put them together."

"Oh, Helen!" said Mary, laughing. "Hours! What can you be thinking of!"

"I suppose we must not say she is thinking of exaggerating again," said Maurice, slyly.

"Well, I am sure if you exaggerate in little, I may in large. I do not see that there is any more harm in making a thing more than it is than less—as you *always* do, Maurice."

"You always say *always*, Helen; but if I do, it is best to be upon the safest side. Now isn't it, Mary? Besides, I only said I thought we had been here more than an hour and a half."

"And you think so too, Helen," said the peace-maker, Mary; "so, for my part, I don't see what you are quarrelling about."

"Because I don't like always to be called names," said Helen, to whose eyes the ready tears were rising. "Maurice always calls me names. Nobody ever did so on board ship."

"I don't call you names," said Maurice; "I only say you exaggerate a little; and you know mamma has often said just the same thing."

"Oh, but Aunt Eleanor is so very, *very* particular. She finds fault if I ever say the least little word more—more—" Helen hesitated.

"More than what is true, I suppose you mean, Nelly," said Maurice; "and if they did not find fault at that on board ship, the sooner everybody does it on land the better, I say."

Helen walked away. She looked very indignant. Maurice laughed. Mary looked distressed.

"You should not say such things to her, Maurice dear," she said. "Remember, she has no papa or mamma, and no brothers or sisters, as mamma says; and so we ought to be so very kind to her."

"Well, and so we are," replied Maurice. "I am sure I did not mean to affront her; but she never can bear the least thing said to her that is not flattery."

"Oh, Maurice! Indeed, I don't think that. I am sure she is very good-natured."

"Oh, I know she is very good-natured, and would give me anything she had in a minute, if she thought I wanted it; or do anything I asked her to do; and I like her very much."

Mary wanted no more. Away she ran to Helen, who was walking slowly towards the rock steps.

"Stop, Helen!" she cried. "Where are you going?"

"I am going away," was the reply.

"Oh, why? Don't go away. Why should you go away?"

"Because I see Maurice hates me, and I don't like to be hated. I shall go home, and you and Maurice may play together alone, as you used to do before I came."

Helen walked on. She reached the steps, and began to mount them. Mary laid hold of her frock.

"Helen, dear, don't go away. Maurice does not hate you—nobody hates you. Do come back and play."

"No, I don't like—you are all very unkind. I wish I was with my own dear mamma and my papa; they never thought me so bad as everybody does here."

Helen sat down upon the steps, covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

Poor Mary stood by her. She felt so unhappy at seeing her cousin cry, and almost inclined to think that they had been treating her very unkindly. She could not bear to hear her speak in the way she did of her "own

mamma and papa," and thought how unhappy she would feel if sent away from hers.

"Don't cry, Helen," at last she said; "Pray don't cry. Maurice says you are so good-natured, that you are always ready to give him anything that you have, that you think he will like."

Helen's sobs began to subside a little.

"And that you are always ready to do anything he asks you to do."

Helen's sobs quite stopped. Mary sat down by her side, and pulled her hands with some difficulty from her face.

"And he says he likes you very much," Mary continued; "so don't cry, there's a darling Helen; and don't think that Maurice hates you, or that anybody hates you, because we all love you so very much. It is only that one little thing, Helen,—only that exaggerating. Don't you think you could give over exaggerating?"

"Oh, I don't care about that," replied Helen, "if you do all really love me, and if

Maurice would not be always telling me about it."

"But if you gave over doing it," said Mary, "you know he could not tell you about it."

"If I saw any harm," answered Helen, "I might, perhaps; but I do not see there is any harm. I am sure I would not tell a real story any more than you or Maurice would."

"Oh, of course you would not—nobody ever thought you would, Nelly dear; but you know mamma says that we cannot possibly be too particular about speaking the exact truth. Mamma seems to think that if we get careless about little things, we might by degrees get careless about great things. I suppose she means that if we do not mind little faults, they will grow into big ones, almost before we know."

Helen made no reply.

"Come, Mary," shouted Maurice, from below; "what are you about? Are you and Helen ever coming? I shall look into the basket, if you don't make haste."

"Oh, we are coming—we are coming!" cried Mary. "Just wait one minute, Maurice. Now, Helen, won't you give me a kiss—and then we will run down the steps and open the basket?"

Helen gave it readily; and, taking Mary's hand in hers, they flew down the steps together, and were at the hut in a moment.

Maurice was discreet enough to make no allusion to this third little quarrel of the day, which passed off as completely as the two first. The basket was opened, and the contents laid one by one upon the table, an exclamation of delight accompanying each.

Mary's doll's china was at the bottom of the basket, and in it the children began to arrange their feast. Should you like to know what Mrs. Hudson had sent them?

In the top dish there were some tiny thin slices of cold roast beef. In the bottom dish there was the wing of a chicken. There were four cheesecakes; but as these were too big to go into one dish, they were obliged

to put one into each corner dish, so they had four dishes of cheesecake. They had two dishes of strawberries, four in each dish ; one tartlet cut into small pieces in another dish, and some jelly in another. In the middle of the table was an iced queencake, and a tiny jug of cream, and another of pounded sugar. Belonging to the doll's dinner-service were four pretty little blue glass decanters, and six wine-glasses to match. The decanters were filled with water at the stream, and then placed upon the table.

And now the children began anxiously waiting for the arrival of their guest ; and at length Mrs. Thornton was seen coming down the wood-walk which led to the bridge, while little Willy scampered on before.

CHAPTER IV.

ROBIN HOOD, Little John, and Friar Tuck, received the Lady Eleanor with due ceremony, and led her into the hut. It must be

confessed that the Lady Eleanor looked rather like a giant amongst the dwarfs, and that she had to stoop her head very low, for fear of knocking it through the roof of the hut. She managed, however, to take her seat upon the stool which was offered to her, without doing any damage to the edifice. Willy was in great delight, and just the right size for an inhabitant. He sat upon the ground, for there was no stool for him, but got his full share of the good things handed round.

“ Oh, here comes Fairy—just in time, before the dinner is all eaten up !” exclaimed Maurice, as a beautiful little black-and-tan spaniel ran into the hut, barking and jumping upon everybody, to show his joy at having discovered them.

Fairy was Mrs. Thornton's dog, and a great favourite with all the children ; he was so pretty, and so playful and good-tempered. And now all the children were eager to give him something to eat ; so he ran from one to another, and got here a piece of cheese-

cake, there a bit of meat, till at last there was not a crumb left upon the table.

Mrs. Thornton now looked at her watch, and said it was time for her to go home, as the carriage was ordered in half an hour to take her to make some calls. Would any of them like to go with her?

"Oh no, no!" they said, "don't let any of us go. No thank you, mamma, we would much rather stay and play at home."

"Very well, my dears, do just as you like," said their mother. "You know you have a whole holiday; but it is nearly half-past twelve now, — remember the schoolroom dinner at one."

"Oh, we don't want any dinner," cried Helen, "do we, Mary? do we, Maurice? We have had quite enough to last us till tea-time."

Mrs. Thornton laughed.

"Rather a fairy-like meal," she said, "I think you will be sorry to have missed your roast mutton and pudding before tea-time, and be coming like a pack of hungry hounds to Mrs. Hudson long before then."

"Oh no, indeed we shan't, Aunt Eleanor," said Helen; "I am sure we have had loads to eat: I would rather not have any more, indeed—would not you, Mary and Maurice?"

"Very well," said Mrs. Thornton, "do just as you please; only remember, that there will be no more dinner after one o'clock. Good-bye, my dears, and enjoy your holiday to your hearts' content. Come, Willy," and Mrs. Thornton and Willy went away.

"Oh, I am so glad you neither of you wanted dinner," said Helen, as soon as she was gone. "It would have been so stupid to have gone into the house, and put on our pinafores, and sat down to dinner just as on common days."

"And to have had to talk that horrid French!" cried Maurice, "and Miss White telling one, '*Ne mangez pas si vite, Monsieur;*' '*Effacez les épaules, Mademoiselle Marie;*' '*Parlez donc Français, Mademoiselle Hélène;*'—and all that stuff! How I do wish mamma did not wish us to talk French—what is the use?"

“ Oh, Maurice,” said Mary, “ how foolish you are ; would you not like to talk French as beautifully as papa does ? and I am sure it is not such a very great trouble, just for the time we are at dinner, after all.”

“ Well, I hate it all the same,” replied Maurice, who was no wiser than most boys of his age ; “ I never want to go into France, and I never want to look into a French book, and I detest ‘ *être*,’ and ‘ *avoir*,’ and *régime directe*, and all that humbug,—and I wish it had never been invented, and I can’t think why we should be bothered with it—I am sure we should get on just as well without it.”

“ You might as well say, why are we bothered with two eyes,” said Mary, laughing ; “ we should see just as well with one ; and though you don’t want to go to France now, perhaps you may when you grow a great man ;—or if you do not want to go to France, you may want to go to some other country, for you often say you should like to travel about, and see the curious things we read of in our books ; and mamma says



Helen and Mary at the Brook, p. 42.

that if we know French readily, we may get about anywhere—in Europe, at least—because almost every one knows it.”

“But that will not help me to *see* better,” said Maurice; “I do not see with my tongue!”

“No, but you hear with your ears,” said Helen, who thought Mary quite right, and did not dislike French herself; “and don’t you remember, Maurice, the other day, when we went to see the China manufactory, how stupid that French gentleman seemed there, who could hardly speak or understand a word of English, and yet wanted to know so much about the china? And how pleased he seemed when we came into the room where he was, and Uncle Thornton spoke to him in French, and explained to him all he wanted to know?”

“Yes,” said Mary, “and mamma said that he thanked papa so much, and said that it was such a pity that French people were not taught English more when they were boys, and that how he found it so difficult to learn it, that he was afraid he never should ;

and papa said, I remember, as we were coming home, that a man might almost as well be deaf and dumb, as travel in a foreign country without knowing any language but his own."

"Oh, well," said Maurice, "I suppose you are right; and now don't let us talk any more about it. What shall we do next?"

"We must wash up the dinner-things first," said Mary. "Come, Helen. Oh, dear, we have not got anything to dry them with!"

"Oh, yes, our pocket handkerchiefs," answered Helen: "Look, Mary, what a nice, smooth, flat stone there is close to the side of the bank! You hand me the plates and dishes, and I will kneel down upon it and wash them."

And Helen, as she spoke, jumped from the bank upon the stone, and, tucking up her petticoats around her, knelt down ready to commence operations.

Mary thought she would much rather have washed her own china herself, and that

she, too, would have liked to have been upon that flat stone, with the cool water round it, just like a real island, than to have stood upon the edge of the bank, handing the plates and dishes. However, she said nothing, and did as Helen asked her.

Maurice, meanwhile, loitered about, throwing pieces of stick into the stream, and trying to make Fairy go in for them. But this Fairy would not do, and only replied to all Maurice's coaxing and urging by loud barks, frisking and bounding.

"Tiresome Fairy! I have a great mind to throw you in from the bridge!" cried Maurice.

"Oh, no, Maurice, you must not. Poor Fairy! He would not like it,—would you, Fairy?" said Mary.

"Nonsense, Mary! It won't do him a bit of harm this hot day. Come, Fay, Fay! Poor Fay!"

Fairy ran up to him, tossed his long silky ears about very saucily, and then scampered away again. Maurice pursued. Fairy rushed

up the rock steps, as if quite aware of the bath Maurice proposed giving him, and then stood still at the top, wagging his tail, till Maurice had nearly reached him, when off he started again, and Maurice after him ; and the next moment both were out of sight.

Mary and Helen, in the meanwhile, went on with their washing, which being ended with only the breaking of one plate, Helen left the flat stone and jumped on the bank again.

" Oh, Helen," cried Mary, " what a mess your frock is in ! and your petticoat, too ! Do look !" and she held up the frock and petticoat to Helen's horrified gaze.

In spite of her having, as she thought, tucked them about her so carefully whilst kneeling on the stone, an end of each had dipped into the water ; then, in getting up the bank again, they had dragged upon the sand ; and the consequences may be supposed. Both frock and petticoat were in a sad mess.

Oh, dear, what shall I do ?" said Helen. " I thought I had tucked up my frock so very carefully. How shall I manage ? Mrs.

Freeman will be so angry. This is one of my best frocks. If it had been done any other way,—if somebody else had done it,—then she could not scold me so much. But she will say it is all my fault, I know, and that I had no business near the water.”

“But you did not do it on purpose, Helen, so nurse cannot be very angry; and suppose she is, as you have not done anything really wrong, you need not mind very much.”

“Oh, but she told me to be sure and change my frock before I went out, and I promised I would,” replied Helen.

“Did you forget, then?” asked Mary.

“Yes—no—not exactly forget. But it is such a trouble to change one’s things; and I thought I should do it no harm. No more I should, if it had not been for this tiresome washing-up. I wish you had done it, Mary. I am sure you ought, for they were your things.”

See how one fault leads to another! and how cross and unjust Helen was getting, because she felt she was to blame about not keeping her word to change her frock.

"I thought you liked to wash up the things yourself," said Mary, "or I am sure I would have washed them. I should have liked to have done it very much."

"I wish you had said so, then," said Helen, pettishly; "and then I should not have dirtied my frock."

"Well, it cannot be helped now, Helen," answered Mary.

"Oh, I don't know! I wonder whether I could wash it out?" And Helen jumped back upon the stone, dipped the dirty end of the frock into the water, and began rubbing it with both hands, as she had seen washerwomen do.

"You had better not, Helen, indeed," said Mary; "you will only make it worse."

And so, indeed, she did. The soil was now nearly half-way up the pretty pink frock.

Helen was ready to cry.

"What shall I do! What shall I say, Mary dear,—do tell me!"

"Oh, never mind, Helen. Just tell the truth—that is all you *can* say, you know."

"But nurse will tell Miss White, and Miss White will be so angry, because of my saying I would change my frock; and she will set me a horrid task, and perhaps tell Aunt Eleanor! Oh, Mary, you must help me to make some excuse. I should not mind now about having dirtied the frock, if it had not been for my promise!"

"Yes, that is just it," answered Mary. "What a pity you did not keep it, Helen dear! I don't think mamma and Miss White would mind about the frock, if you had only not made the promise."

"But how could I, if I forgot it?" asked Helen.

"Oh, but Helen, you know you said you had not forgotten it,—that you did not do it because it was a trouble."

Helen looked down, confused. After a little silence, she said:—

"But I was very near forgetting it; and I dare say—I am quite sure—I should have forgotten it, if I had not just happened to pass the open nursery-door as I was leaving

Aunt Eleanor's room, and saw Martha changing Willy's frock; and that put me in mind. It is very hard I should be punished just because the nursery-door was open; for if I *had* forgotten, I should not be blamed half so much. I have a great mind to say I forgot all about it. You won't tell, Mary, what I just told you by accident, will you?"

"Oh, Helen—Helen—what are you thinking about!" said Mary, quite shocked. "You know it would be telling quite an untruth."

"Oh, but such a little, tiny one—and that cannot possibly do any harm to anybody."

"Oh, Helen, if you tell an untruth, what difference will it make whether it is a little one or a big one? It will be an untruth all the same; and though it would be still more naughty to do a wrong thing if it would harm any one, it will not make a wrong thing less wrong because it does not, will it?"

Helen hung down her head. She kept drawing the spoiled end of her frock back-

wards and forwards through her hands. The tears gathered in her eyes, and rolled down her cheek.

"Then I shall be scolded and punished, and Aunt Eleanor will think me so naughty, because I broke my promise once before about not coming back to my sewing, when Miss White allowed me to go and play in the garden for half an hour upon conditions that I would. And all might be saved if I had only not remembered! Oh, how I wish I had not passed the nursery-door!"

If Helen had wished that she had had a greater regard for her word, it would have been much better, and still better if that wish had proceeded from sorrow at having done what was wrong, not from the dread of being punished for what she had done wrong.

Mary's kind heart was full of compassion at seeing her cousin's distress.

"I am so sorry for you, dear Helen," said she, taking her hand; "so very sorry!"

Helen drew her hand away.

"You pretend to be very sorry, Mary," she

said, "and yet you will not help me one little bit. I am sure I would do anything for you."

"But I never would ask you to do anything wrong for me, I hope, Helen."

"I don't think it is wrong!"

"Oh, Helen! how can you say so? Here comes Maurice; we will ask him whether it is ever not wrong to tell an untruth."

"Oh, no, no," said Helen; "don't Mary, please don't! I don't mean that exactly; I don't mean that it is not wrong to tell an untruth. Don't say anything to Maurice, he will laugh at me so, and think me so naughty. I will not say I forgot to Mrs. Freeman; indeed I will not."

"There's a dear, Helen," said Mary, kissing her; "you will tell her all the truth, will you not?"

"Yes,—yes; if she asks me."

At this moment Maurice reached them. His face was red and hot, and he threw himself upon the grass.

"Oh, I have had such a chase after Fairy. I am so tired," he cried.

"Why, where have you been?" asked Mary.

"Oh, quite up to the house, running all the way; and it is so hot! Fairy ran home, and mamma was just going out when I got to the hall-door. I was so hungry with my running. Mamma laughed when I told her, and said she knew I should be; but that the schoolroom dinner was over now; but that I might go and get as much bread-and-butter as I wanted from Mrs. Hudson. So I did; and then came back again, as you see. I could not catch Fairy, though."

"Oh, I am so hungry, too," cried Helen; "I wish you had not talked about dinner."

"And so am I," said Mary. "Oh, Maurice, why did not you bring us some bread-and-butter too?"

"How do you know I have not? There," said Maurice, "look in that basket; you will find plenty. You see Robin Hood did not forget his comrades. You must fancy it venison pasty."

The two little girls fell upon the basket

and its contents very much like the hungry hounds Mrs. Thornton had talked about. As Helen passed close to Maurice as he lay upon the grass he perceived the state of her frock.

"What a pretty mess you are in, Nelly," he said, laughing; "you look as if you had been dragged through a pond. I would rather not be you when nurse sees it."

"Oh, never mind," said Helen, tucking the dirty end beneath her as she sat eating her bread-and-butter upon the grass; "it is no affair of yours, Maurice. What shall we play at next? I am quite tired of being Little John."

"You had better go to the house and change your frock first, had you not, Helen?" asked Mary. "It must be so wet and uncomfortable; and you may catch cold."

"Will you come and take it off for me, Mary? I dare say the servants have not done dinner yet; and we might get in by the library window, and no one would see us."

"Nurse must see your frock, sooner or

later," said Maurice ; so I don't see what that signifies."

" Perhaps nurse might not see it at all. Martha is so good-natured ; I shall tell her, and I dare say she will say nothing about it to nurse. Come, Mary, let us make haste before the servants have done dinner. Wait for us in the flower-garden, Maurice." Maurice said he would, and the two cousins walked quietly towards the house.

" If I were you, I think I would tell nurse at once," said Mary, as they went, after a little thought ; " I am sure you will feel much more comfortable. It must be so very uncomfortable always to be afraid of something being found out. Indeed, Helen, you had much better tell."

" It is no affair of yours, Mary," answered Helen, crossly ; " so I wish you would not say anything more about it."

Mary did say no more about it, as she found it so useless. They reached the house, and went through the library window, which they found open, upstairs to their own room,

which was next the nursery. The frock that Helen should have put on lay upon the bed ready for her. Quickly she slipped off her pink frock, with Mary's assistance, and quickly was she dressed again in a clean petticoat and her other frock. Quickly, too, did she roll the dirty one up, and thrust it into one of her drawers. As she was trying to shut it, for it was very full, the servants were heard coming up from dinner.

"Mary, Mary, help me, quick; I cannot shut this drawer; do make haste!" cried Helen, her voice trembling with eagerness, and her face quite red with fright.

It certainly would have been much better, as Mary said, to have told about her accident at once. It is very uncomfortable, indeed, to have anything to conceal. With Mary's assistance the drawer was shut, the servants passed on; no one came into the room.

Helen breathed again.

"How frightened you look, Helen," Mary could not help saying; "I wonder you mind so much."

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Helen made no answer ; she was tying on her bonnet and tippet.

" Let us go down into the garden again," she said, when she had finished, " I am quite ready."

They found Maurice waiting for them, as he had promised.

" I have thought of a game," said he, as they joined him.

" Let us play at ' I spy.' I will hide first, and Mary and you must look for me, Helen."

" Very well," said Helen ; " only let us make some boundary rule. If you go and hide in the wood, we shall never find you ; and it has got so hot we do not want to run very far, do we, Mary ?"

" Then we will make it a rule not to go out of the flower-garden," said Maurice ; " and the summer-house is to be the safety-place."

So that was satisfactorily settled, and Maurice went to hide while the two girls walked to the summer-house.

Now this flower-garden was a very beautiful one, and full of beautiful flowers; which were cultivated, as all beautiful things must be, with very great care. Mr. and Mrs. Thornton were both very fond of their garden, and often worked together in it with their own hands. The head gardener had obtained several prizes at the annual flower exhibition in the neighbouring town.

Our children were allowed to play in this beautiful garden as much as they liked, under the condition that they were not to run over the borders or gather the flowers.

"There he is," exclaimed Helen, when the little girls had been seated a few minutes in the summer-house, as a "whoop!" was heard from a distant part of the garden; "he is near the fountain."

"It sounded more from the sun-dial, I thought," said Mary. "Hush—there he is again!"

"Whoop!"

"The fountain, certainly," cried Helen.

"Well, you go towards the fountain, and I to the sun-dial," replied Mary, "and we shall see which is right."

And off they started in different directions.

Slowly and cautiously crept Helen towards the fountain, peering into every bush as she passed, starting at every sound. She reached the fountain in safety—no Maurice was to be seen.

"I spy!" shouted Mary at the top of her voice from the other side of the garden; "run, Helen, for your life!"

Helen saw no one, but flew back towards the safety-place. Now it happened that directly in her way lay a bed of very fine tulips, which Mr. Thornton had been cultivating with the greatest pains. The bulbs had been sent him from Amsterdam. These tulips were to be exhibited at the flower-show, which was to take place in a day or two, and the gardener felt sure he should gain the prize for the "finest specimen of cut tulips." The children had been espe-

cially warned not to go near this bed till the flower-show was over.

“Helen—Helen—run!” cried Mary;
“Maurice is behind you!”

She had herself already reached the summer-house. Helen gave one hasty glance behind. Maurice was running round the fountain to catch her. The tulip-bed lay just between her and the shortest way to the safety-place. She dashed through it—snap went two of the finest tulips—breathless she reached the summer-house, and threw herself gasping upon the seat.

Mary burst into a joyous laugh.

Maurice came up to the summer-house.

“I thought I should have caught you, Helen; I was creeping up to you as you stood by the fountain, only Mary saw me and called out ‘I spy;’ and off you started like a deer. I can’t think, though, how you managed to get safe, without you ran through some of the flower-beds,—for there were so many in your way, I felt sure I should catch you still. But I lost sight of you as I ran

round the great rhododendron-bed, and when I saw you again you were close to the summer-house ;—how fast you must have run !”

“ Yes !” said Helen, fanning herself with her bonnet ; “ oh, how hot I am !”

“ Now, Maurice, go and hide again,” said Mary.

Maurice went. After a little pause—

“ How silent you are, Helen,” she continued.

“ I am so tired !” said Helen. But she was thinking of the tulip-bed.

Maurice shouted from his hiding-place. The girls started upon the search. They could not decide where the voice had proceeded from this time, and Maurice gave no second call.

Helen went towards the wood ; she could think of nothing but the tulip-bed, and longed for an opportunity of going there alone, to see what mischief she had done. She was startled by a rustling in a thick bush close to her.

“ I spy !” she shouted, and rushed towards the safety-place. A blackbird flew

out of the bush, and Helen fell into the arms of Maurice.

"Ha! ha! I have caught you this time, Miss Helen! Did I not manage it cleverly? I shouted from the other end of the garden, and then ran as fast as I could round by the shrubbery to the summer-house; and when you called 'I spy,' I waited till you came quite near, and then jumped out upon you like a spider upon a poor little fly."

Mary joined them.

"Are you caught, Helen?" she asked.

"Yes, I am; and now I am going to hide."

"Well, make haste," said Maurice.

Helen went away in the direction of the tulip-bed, which was not in sight of the summer-house. Her heart beat fast as she approached it, and faster still when she found that her fears were too true; two of the tallest and finest tulips lay snapped upon the ground, and in the middle of the border was the print of her foot. She stood gazing upon the consequences of her disobedience for some few moments, not knowing what

to do, and feeling very much inclined to cry, and very miserable indeed. She never thought of the straightforward course of telling her aunt what a misfortune she had met with,—she only thought of the best way of concealing it. When people once allow themselves a bad habit, it is very difficult to leave it, and very easy to increase it. Helen allowed herself the weak and cowardly habit of concealment when she did anything that she feared would be blamed. Every time that she did wrong, every time that she met with an accident, only made her more cowardly. We have seen how she acted about her frock earlier in the morning. She was more afraid of her uncle than of Mrs. Freeman or Miss White, and therefore still more resolved to hide this second misfortune. Accordingly, she pulled a little branch off a tree, and smoothed over the mark of her foot, and she picked up the broken tulips, and threw them into the rhododendron bed.

“It will never be found out,” thought she,

"there are so many! I am sure no one will ever miss these two. After all, I could not help it. It was quite an accident! I never meant to break the rules."

No more Helen did. She had run over the border in the hurry of the moment. It was a misfortune that might have happened to any one,—to Maurice, or even Mary, who was so careful. But Maurice and Mary would have told immediately. They would have taken the flowers to their papa, have told him how sorry they were, and have begged him to forgive them. You may think it was much easier for Maurice and Mary to have told Mr. Thornton, because he was their papa, and that being only Helen's uncle, she was naturally more likely to be afraid of him. But, dear children, we must not make excuses to ourselves for doing what is wrong because it is painful and difficult to do what is right. We *must do right*, without counting the cost, and at any sacrifice.

"What an age Helen is!" said Maurice to Mary. "What can she be about? Helen!" he shouted, with both hands to

his mouth, by way of a speaking trumpet, "Helen! Will you ever be ready! We are tired of waiting! We are coming out!" Helen heard his voice, and recollecting herself, ran behind the nearest bush.

"Whoop!" she cried.

"I spy!" cried Maurice. "Why, Helen, you stupid girl!" as he and Mary regained the summer-house, followed by Helen; "What could you be thinking of? I saw you the moment I turned the corner of the summer-house!"

"I am tired of 'I spy!'" said Helen, who had lost all pleasure in the game. "I am tired of play."

"What, already?" said Maurice. "Why, our holiday is not half over."

"Let us go in, and paint till we are rested," proposed Mary. "I will lend you my best paint-brush, Nelly, and my pictures of the History of England, if you like."

But even this could give Helen no pleasure. She feared to go into the house, for fear Mrs. Freeman might have found out about her frock; she was afraid of staying

in the garden, for fear the gardener, or, worst of all, her uncle, might find out about the tulips. She felt very miserable.

"How wretched you look, Nelly," remarked Maurice. "What is the matter with you?"

"No, I don't," said Helen. "How teasing you are, Maurice!"

"And how cross you are, Helen! There is no speaking to you—there, go away! I don't want to play with you any more!"

"No more do I want to play with you any more, you tiresome boy!"

"Oh, don't!" said Mary, who could not bear to hear any one quarrel. "Leave her alone, there's a dear Maurice—she is only so tired. Come, Helen, let us go in doors."

CHAPTER V.

WHEN the two little girls went to their own room that evening, to dress for dessert, Helen told Martha what had happened to

her frock, and entreated her to get it washed without letting Mrs. Freeman see it. Martha, who was very good-natured, was quite willing to assist Helen to escape nurse's anger, whom she thought was often much more cross than was necessary about such accidents. She knew nothing about Helen's promise, or she would have thought it her duty to mention how ill she had kept it. So she promised to take the pink frock to the laundry, and wash it herself that very evening. Helen felt very much relieved.

When they were dressed, the cousins went down to dessert with Maurice and little Willy.

"Well, dears, have you had a very pleasant day?" inquired Mrs. Thornton.

"Oh, yes, mamma," said Maurice, "such a delightful day! I wish we might have holidays all the summer through."

"You would soon be tired of them, my boy," answered his father; "at least, I hope so."

"Oh, no, I should never be tired of them! But why do you hope so, papa?"

"Because I hope you have more in you than would be satisfied with nothing but play from morning till night—something of the bee, as well as the butterfly."

"Let us hear what you did with your holiday," said Mrs. Thornton. "Did you play in the hut all day, Helen?"

"Oh, no, Aunt Eleanor. Mary and I were tired, and we went and painted indoors."

"You forgot our game of 'I Spy' first, Helen," said Mary.

"We played such a short time at that," answered Helen.

"Indeed, we played nearly an hour at it," said Maurice, "and I thought it the most amusing game of all. Oh, papa, you cannot think what a bad place Helen chose to hide in! After keeping us waiting ever such a long time, when we left the safety-place the first thing we saw was her, so of course we just walked quietly back again."

"Where did you play?" inquired Mr. Thornton.

"In the flower-garden," answered Maurice.

"Rather a bad place to choose for a game at 'I Spy,' Maurice."

"Oh, papa, we were very careful not to hurt any of the flowers, or go over the beds," said Mary.

I cannot tell you how uncomfortable and miserable Helen felt all this time. How she longed to creep from the room—under the table—anywhere; for she felt her cheeks growing burning hot, and she was so afraid it might be noticed.

"I am glad to hear that," said Mr. Thornton. "Talking of the flower-beds puts me in mind! My dear mamma, I am afraid you will be nearly as vexed as I am, and as poor Green is. I went, as usual, to look at the tulip-beds when I came in from town, and was very much annoyed indeed to find that two of the finest,—De Ruyter and De Witt,—have disappeared!"

Helen's heart died within her.

"Disappeared!" exclaimed Mrs. Thornton. "How very strange! What can have become of them?"

"They appear to have been broken off close to the ground; but as they are not to be found, they evidently must have been carried off by some one or something."

"Were there no footprints upon the border?" asked Mrs. Thornton.

"No; I examined very carefully. There was a little scratched mark, but it did not look like a footmark, without it was a very light one, and had been brushed over."

"Some animal might have broken them off—a rabbit, perhaps," said Mrs. Thornton.

"So I should have supposed; only rabbits do not eat tulips, and the tulips themselves have disappeared. It is this which makes me think some person must have gathered them. You are quite sure, children, that none of you did gather them?"

"Oh, no, indeed, papa," cried Maurice and Mary, both at once; "we should never have thought of doing such a thing."

"Nor you, Helen?" asked Mr. Thornton, turning to her.

"No, indeed, uncle!" she answered; but her face grew scarlet.

"I am sure Helen would not have gathered them any more than we would, papa," said Mary.

Oh, if Helen could have had the courage to confess, that though indeed she had not *gathered* the tulips, yet she had been the cause of the accident! She saved her conscience, she thought, and told no untruth. She only equivocated. But did she not deceive quite as much? And so fearfully near the edge of a falsehood as she stood, who can answer for themselves that the next moment may not plunge them into one?

This time she escaped, for Mr. Thornton did not carry on his examination, and addressed her no more upon the subject. Helen's spirit revived again within her; but, instead of making a resolution that she would do her utmost to avoid falling into such a temptation of deceitfulness again, she only congratulated herself that she had been so lucky as to escape further questioning.

After dessert, Mr. and Mrs. Thornton stepped out of the open glass windows of the dining-room into the flower-garden. The children followed them, and so did Fairy, who had been lying at Mrs. Thornton's feet during dessert. The children ran about the terrace with little Willy, enjoying themselves in the soft, warm summer evening. Helen thought herself now quite safe from being ever found out, and was as merry as any of them.

"Oh, what has Fay got?" cried Willy. "He has got something in his mouth; look Morry!" He could not say Maurice. "Here, Fairy, Fairy!" shouted Maurice, running after him.

The little dog stopped, looked Maurice in the face very saucily, and then pretending to growl, scampered away again. He certainly had something in his mouth, which every now and then he tossed up into the air and caught again.

Willy laughed very much, and so did Mary and Helen, who joined in the pursuit.

Maurice soon caught him this time.

"Oh, papa! oh, mamma!" he cried, what do you think? Fairy has got the tulips! Look! look!" and he ran towards them, holding the flowers in his hand, which were now so torn and tattered that they bore little resemblance to the stately De Ruyter and De Witt which had so lately raised their gaily-painted heads above the other beauties in the tulip-bed.

"Are these them?" Maurice continued, handing them to his father.

"No doubt of it," said Mr. Thornton; "how did Fairy come by them?"

"He had been routing about in the rhododendron-bed for some time, and presently he ran out with them in his mouth."

"I think there can be little doubt of his being the culprit," said Mrs. Thornton. "Oh, fie! Fairy!" as the little dog came up, wagging his tail, and jumping about Mr. Thornton to recover his playthings.

"No, no; naughty dog!" said his master. "This will never do. If you take to breaking the flowers and running off with

them, it will be sad work. You must be punished for this, Mr. Fairy."

Helen, Mary, and Willy now came up.

"We have found out who did the mischief," cried Maurice; "it is Fairy. Oh, bad little dog!" shaking his hand at him.

Poor little Fairy, untroubled in his conscience, still kept jumping up for the flowers.

Mr. Thornton broke off a small switch from a tree near him.

"Oh, what is papa going to do?" cried Mary.

"I must punish him, my dear; for I cannot have him get into the habit of spoiling my flowers." He held up the rod threateningly. Fairy crouched at his feet.

"Oh, Uncle Thornton," cried Helen, "Please don't hurt him. Perhaps he did not do it after all. Please don't, Uncle Thornton," and the tears rose to her eyes.

"You are a kind-hearted little girl, Nelly," said Mr. Thornton, patting her head; "but I think there is no doubt of Fairy's having done the mischief, and I own I am not sorry

to be satisfied that it is no one else, who might have known better. I think it necessary to punish him ; because if I do not, he will get into the habit of being mischievous, and I should have to give him away, which I should be sorry to do."

" Give Fairy away ! Oh, no, papa ! " cried Mary, Maurice, and Willy.

" Then I must punish him," said Mr. Thornton.

" Oh, don't hurt him ! " cried Helen.

" Only a very little, my dear."

Helen and Mary ran away, that they might not see the punishment inflicted. But though Helen stopped her ears, she could not help hearing the cries of the little dog as Mr. Thornton gave him two or three sharp switches with the rod ; and every cry went to her heart, for she knew it was not Fairy who deserved the punishment, and that she might have prevented it had she not been so cowardly and weak. The little dog ran off as soon as his punishment was over, little the worse for it, and as gay as ever. But

Helen felt very unhappy for the next quarter of an hour, and very much ashamed of herself.

Then she thought, "it is only a little dog, after all, and he does not mind being punished half so much as I should."

The children had cake for tea. Helen kept a large piece of hers to give to Fairy, and her conscience felt satisfied. Ought it to have been ?

PART II.

RED INK.

CHAPTER I.

It was some little time after the disaster with the tulips. Helen had forgotten all about the adventures of that day. She had even given over being sorry at her own conduct, for she had never been found out, never been punished, and the remorse she had felt for a little time had made no lasting impression upon her.

Helen and Mary were playing together in the library one afternoon. It was a wet day, and they could not go out of doors. The children were very fond of playing in the library, for there was a little gallery which ran round the room, about half-way between the floor and ceiling, and a flight of iron steps, with pretty brass bannisters, led to

this gallery. There were high bookcases all round the library, and it was to enable people to reach the books in the top shelves that this gallery had been constructed; and up and down the steps and round and round the gallery the children were very fond of running. They were not allowed to take out any of the books to look at,—of these they had plenty in their own schoolroom, picture-books and others; and Mr. Thornton was very particular about his books.

Maurice had gone back to his school, which was the reason that Mary and Helen were playing alone this afternoon. Helen was engaged with her doll. She had put its hair into papers, and now with a tiny tortoiseshell-comb she was combing out the curls. Mary was playing with her box of bricks, and had just finished building a round-tower nearly as tall as herself.

“How I do wish it would have done raining!” exclaimed Helen, at last. “I want to go out so much. It is so stupid staying indoors. Is not it, Mary?”

"Yes. I wish it would have done," said Mary, carelessly. She was putting the last row of bricks to her tower.

"It would be of no good if it was to stop," Helen continued, looking out of the window. "It is so soaking wet, that I am sure Miss White would not let us go out, if it were to turn out ever so fine. I wish it would never rain, don't you, Mary?"

"No, I don't, indeed, Helen; for what would become of all the poor flowers? Why it was only yesterday that you were longing for rain, because your garden was so parched up with the sun, and your flowers all fading away, because you did not like the trouble of watering them."

Helen could not make any reply to this. She had thrown aside her doll, and now stood at the window, following the rain-drops with her finger, as they coursed one another down the glass. "I wish Maurice was come home again," was the next thing she said; "we never can have any nice plays without him;" and she yawned.

Mary was roofing in her tower with the greatest care; the least unwary touch and down it would have gone.

"When he was here you always were wishing him at school, Helen," she replied.

"Oh that was only when he teased me," answered Helen. "I should not mind that a bit, if he were only back again. When shall you have finished that tower, Mary? You have been such a long time about it, and I do so want to build a palace. Do let us build a palace."

With one touch Mary, the good-natured Mary, demolished her tower, which fell with a loud crash to the ground, and began, with Helen, to raise an edifice of another order of architecture. However, the two little girls could not make anything to their satisfaction, with all their united genius. Four or five different attempts had been made, to be knocked down one after the other in disgust, before they were half completed, when Sally opened the door, requesting Miss Mary would go to the nursery, as Mrs. Freeman wanted

to try on a new frock she was making for her.

Sally was a girl about fourteen years old, who was employed to wait upon the nursery, to fetch up water and coals, dust the room, run errands for the nurse, and so forth. She was not very much wanted, but she was the daughter of an old servant of Mrs. Thornton's, who had married a worthless, drunken kind of man, and who lived in great want in the village; and so Mrs. Thornton had kindly taken this girl into her house to take her off her mother's hands, and out of her bad father's way, who used often to beat and ill-use her, and also that she might have the advantage of learning, under Mrs. Freeman's strict eye, how to become a good and useful servant.

Mary went away with Sally, and Helen was left alone. She amused herself with trying to build a church. But she could not make anything that looked the least like one. Suddenly it came into her head that if she had a picture of one before her, she might

perhaps be able to copy it ; and she remembered that, not long ago, her aunt Eleanor had been making a water-colour drawing from some beautiful architectural engravings, in a large book in this very library. She rose from the floor to look if she could see this book. She recollected it perfectly. It was beautifully bound in red morocco, and richly gilt.

Helen went all round the bookcases in search of it ; but she could not see it, though in one of the bottom shelves there was a gap as if some large book had been taken away.

" Aunt Eleanor has taken it into the drawing-room," she thought. But Aunt Eleanor had done no such thing, unfortunately. The book lay upon the library-table, and as Helen was returning to the window and the bricks, there she saw it. " How stupid !" she exclaimed ; " there it is all the time." And she carefully opened the book.

Now it has already been mentioned that the children were expressly forbidden ever

to meddle with the books in the library,—books of engravings most particularly, as these were the most likely to attract them. While Helen was looking for the book, she had not remembered the prohibition; but directly that she opened it, and saw the pictures, it came back to her mind, and she knew that she ought to have closed it immediately.

But the pictures were so beautiful; and she caught a glimpse, as she turned two or three leaves hurriedly over, of such a lovely church—just the church she wanted; and it looked so easy, she was sure she should be able to make something like it with the bricks. The temptation was too strong for any one as weak as Helen to resist. Every time we yield to temptation we become weaker; and Helen always yielded to temptation.

“What harm can it possibly do the pictures?” thought she. “I am sure Aunt Eleanor would allow me to look at them if she knew how usefully I wanted them; besides, nobody will know.”

Oh, that dangerous “nobody will know.”

Helen turned to the church again.

"I will only look at this one church," she thought.

But as she looked, it occurred to her that the arched window would be too difficult for her to accomplish; she would just turn over two or three more pages, to see if she could find one more easy. But no; all the churches seemed one more difficult than another,—so she thought, as instead of two or three, she turned over at least ten pages.

"I will not try to build a church at all," she said to herself. "Here is a beautiful old house! All the windows are square. This will be nice and easy—I will try this."

The book was at the further end of the table from where the bricks lay. Helen found she must bring the book to this other end, and open as it lay at the place she had found, she began to pull it to where she wanted it to be.

Now it so chanced that Mr. Thornton had been engaged at his accounts with his bailiff in the library that very morning, and had

been using red ink to rule the lines in the accounts. For some reason or other he had been called suddenly away, and had left the red-ink bottle uncorked upon the library-table. It was a small stone bottle, rather tall for its thickness; and Helen never perceived it, as she pushed the heavy book along, open at the picture of the beautiful old house, till a crimson stream over the page attracted her attention to it in a very disagreeable manner indeed.

She had, somehow or other, contrived to knock the bottle over, and the ink poured over the engraving.

Helen gazed at the mischief she had done in speechless dismay for a few seconds; and then, half wild with fright, felt for her pocket-handkerchief to dab up the ink. She had not got one!

What *could* she do? What must she do? The ink river was getting wider and wider! What would her uncle say? The book would be quite, quite spoiled!

These thoughts passed through her head

much faster than I can write or you can read, as she looked wildly round the room, in the hopeless endeavour to see something that might serve her to wipe up the ink with. There was nothing.

There was no help for it—she must run to the housemaid for a duster ; and, quick as lightning, she was through the door which led to the back stairs, in search of Susan.

She had not ran many steps along the passage, when, oh joy ! she saw something lying in a heap in a corner,—a cloth of some kind,—what it was she never stopped to examine ; but, crimson with excitement, stooped down, picked it up, and ran back again into the library, banging the door after her.

All this had taken her such a little time to do, that the ink had not dried upon the book, and she wiped most of it away with the cloth ; but the stain remained. The broad stain, like a red river, ran straight down the middle of the roof of the old house, over the front door, and through the park, drowning a group of deer in its passage.

Many plans passed through poor Helen's head. She would scratch it out with a pen-knife—perhaps some water would take it out. But she chanced to have on that very pink frock upon which she had made the unsuccessful experiment the day of the feast in the hut. She remembered how much worse she had made it by trying to make it better, and thought it more prudent to make no attempts upon the book. .

And now again she began to ask herself what she was to do? What would her uncle say? Oh, she never, never could dare to tell him! He would be so much displeased!

Then she thought, why should he ever know? She had never seen him look at picture-books in her life. Aunt Eleanor had finished her drawing, and was not likely to be looking at the book again. Mary was certain never to find it out. She would never dream of opening any of the books in the library—she was so obedient; and, as Helen thought this, her heart smote her.

“No,” she went on thinking, “I will not

tell. It will only vex Uncle Thornton very much. Perhaps it may never be found out; and who knows, perhaps the red ink may fade, and the stain go quite, quite away, in time. It looks paler already, I do think!"

Helen shut the book, and pushed it back to its place. But, oh, how heavy her heart felt!

And now Mary came bounding in, so happy and gay. She had nothing to hide.

"Oh, Nelly, are you not quite tired of waiting? I thought I never should have come back to you! Nurse Freeman was so particular,—so particular! And I could hardly stand still at last, I was so impatient to get to the bricks again, for I have thought of such a beautiful plan!"

"Have you been playing with the bricks all this time?" Mary continued, as she knelt down on the floor, and began arranging them. "Look, Helen, this is my plan! This is to be the porch,—look! But you are not paying any attention, Helen. Do see! Is not this pretty?"

"Yes, very," said Helen, hardly looking at it.

At this moment the door opened, and Mr. Thornton came in.

"Well, young ladies," he said, "what are you about?"

"Making houses with our bricks, papa," answered Mary.

Helen was too much frightened to say a word.

"Papa, do come here for one moment, and see! Is not this a beautiful portico? All out of my own head, papa!" continued Mary.

"It is a grand portico, indeed," said Mr. Thornton, coming up to her, and stroking her head.

"Oh, papa, do stay and help us! Do papa; you always invent such beautiful buildings."

"Another day, dear; I have not time now. I have only come for a bottle of red ink I left here;" and he went towards the library-table.

Helen's heart actually stopped beating, as Mr. Thornton took up the bottle. Some-

thing seemed to surprise him, for he walked to the window and looked into the bottle.

"How very odd!" he said to himself. "I could have been certain there had been more ink in it than this."

"Oh, Helen," cried Mary, "please take care! Oh, you have knocked it all down! Never mind!" seeing Helen's look of confusion and alarm, and supposing it to be caused by her sorrow for having ruined the portico; "I will soon build it up again."

Mr. Thornton left the room with the ink-bottle, without saying any more about its diminished contents. Helen and Mary continued to play with their bricks till Sally came to fetch them to tea.

CHAPTER II.

Two or three days passed. The accident to the book remained undiscovered; and though Helen had felt so uncomfortable the first night that she almost made up her mind to tell, yet every hour that passed with-

out her having done so made the confession more and more difficult. This is always the case.

Helen thought that her misfortune would never be found out ; but she was mistaken, as we shall presently see.

"Miss Mary, your papa wants to speak to you and Miss Helen, in the library," said John, the footman, opening the schoolroom door one day.

These words seemed very simple ; but simple as they were, Helen turned pale. She could hardly be comfortable whenever her uncle was in the library, for fear he should find out about the book ; how much more alarming was it to be sent for to speak to him there. She felt dreadfully afraid it had all been discovered, and that she and Mary were now called in to be questioned. But there was no help for it, her uncle had sent for her, and she knew she must go, so she followed Mary, though very reluctantly.

Mary opened the library door, and they both went in. Helen cast a hasty glance to the table. There sat Mr. Thornton. The

book open before him at the place where was the red ink, Helen felt sure, and she turned quite giddy.

"Well, papa, what do you want us for?" Mary said, running gaily up to him. "Have you anything pretty to show us?"

She was at his side; but Helen still lingered at the door. She had knelt down, pretending to tie her shoe, for it was not really untied; but she thought it would give her time to recover her confusion. See how one fault leads to another! Helen was beginning to deceive.

"Your mamma and I are going to call upon a lady who lives some distance off, and as we shall pass some very beautiful ruins on the way, we mean to take you and Helen with us. As you are both of you so fond of building, and so ingenious with your bricks, we think you would like to see these ruins, which are very famous. Shall you, my dears?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Mary; "so much, so much! Nelly, do you hear? Won't it be delightful! Shall you not like it?"

Helen, who had felt very much relieved by finding that at all events she was still safe, now came up to the table, and had it not been that the dreaded book lay so very, very near, would have felt as happy as Mary.

"You two little girls must be quite ready by half past twelve," Mr. Thornton continued. "We shall take luncheon with us, and you shall eat it in the ruins."

Mary clapped her hands with delight.

"We shall be there an hour at least, as your mamma is going to sketch; and now, my dears, I sent for you here to show you some views of these ruins before we go, as I think you will understand them better, and therefore enjoy seeing them more, if I explain to you about them beforehand. There is a drawing in this book of the ruins "restored," as it is called, that means, as it is supposed they stood before the building was knocked to pieces by Cromwell. I will show you this view first, that you may understand how the castle was when it was perfect; and

then I will show you another picture of it, as it now stands, and as you will see it to-day."

Mr. Thornton turned over the leaves of the book as he spoke, looking for the views he spoke of.

I cannot describe to you how Helen felt as she stood by as her uncle was doing this, expecting every fresh leaf he turned over would discover the dreadful stain.

Slowly and carefully Mr. Thornton turned them over—for the engravings were very valuable—slowly, one by one.

"How beautiful they are, papa!" cried Mary, who was eagerly looking on. "What lovely pictures! Turn them still more slowly, dear papa. I like looking at them so much!"

Her father complied, and drew her upon his knee, that she might see them still better.

"But Helen can't see," said Mary; who always thought of other people's enjoyment. "Helen, you are not looking!" "Yes, I can,—yes, I am," said Helen; who wished the book anywhere but upon the table,—anywhere but in Mr. Thornton's hands.

Mr. Thornton made more room for her.

"Stand upon the stool, Nelly," he said, "and then you can see quite well."

Slowly he turned over the pages, stopping every now and then to explain to the children anything that was particularly curious and interesting. They had now got nearly to the middle of the book. Helen knew that the "Old House" was coming. She felt very sick, and turned quite pale.

Should she tell all, before her uncle came to the fatal page?

She was just thinking this, when her uncle said—

"This is a very valuable book indeed. There were very few copies of it published, and it was given to me by a friend, who is now dead, and whom I loved very much indeed; I mean your mother's brother, Mary, whom you have often heard her speak of, though he died before you were born."

Helen gave up all thoughts of telling now.

Mr. Thornton turned over the next page.

"Why, how comes this?" he cried; "who can have done this?"

There lay before him the "Old House," with the red-ink river over the roof, over the front door, through the park, and drowning the deer!

"Oh, what a pity!" exclaimed Mary; "oh, papa, what a pity!" Helen said nothing.

"I must find out about this," said Mr. Thornton, lifting Mary from his knee, and rising. He bent down close over the paper.

"It is red ink," he said; "some one must have been looking at this book who had no business to touch it." He looked very much displeased. "The stain looks quite fresh," he continued. "It must have been made quite lately. Run, Mary, and ask your mamma to be so good as to come here for a moment. She was drawing from this book last week. I want to know whether she happened to see this view then."

"I will go, Mary," said Helen, who could not bear the thoughts of remaining alone with her uncle and the book. And before Mary could make any remonstrance she was out of the room.

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She soon came back with her aunt. Little girl as she was, she did not dare stay behind for fear her uncle might suspect something.

"I want to ask you whether, when you were drawing from this book last week, you happened to look at the view of 'Haddon Hall,' dear mamma?" said Mr. Thornton, as his wife entered the room.

"Yes, certainly I did. Indeed I began to make a drawing from it, till I changed my mind, and drew 'Netley Abbey,' instead."

"Did you notice, my dear, whether it had any mark upon it?" asked Mr. Thornton.

"Mark upon it?" repeated his wife.
"None that I noticed."

"You would have noticed such a mark as this?" said Mr. Thornton, and he showed her the page.

"What a pity!" she exclaimed. "No, certainly it was not done when I last had the book. It must have been done since then. What is it?—what is the stain?"

"It is red ink, I have no doubt," said Mr. Thornton.

"But how can it have been done?—who can have done it?"

"That we must find out," said Mr. Thornton, very gravely. "Children!"—he looked with a searching look at Mary and Helen—"have either of you been so disobedient as to meddle with my books?"

"No, indeed, papa," said Mary; but her voice was low and her face coloured up, for she felt frightened by her father's severe manner. The most innocent often look guilty from timidity, and the very idea of her father supposing she might have done the mischief terrified her.

"No, indeed, uncle," said Helen, in equally low tones; her face also grew crimson, but from a different reason. It was the first direct falsehood she had ever told.

Mr. Thornton observed the signs of confusion on both the children's faces.

"Are you *sure*, children?" he said, still more impressively.

"Indeed, papa, I did not do it," repeated Mary.

He turned to Helen.

"No, uncle," she said.

"It must have been done last Tuesday," said Mr. Thornton. "I was using red ink upon this very table that day, I remember; and I remember that I was suddenly called away, and left the bottle standing just there,"—and he pointed to the place;—"I am afraid I was so careless as to leave it uncorked."

"It might have been knocked over accidentally, or fallen itself over the book, then," said Mrs. Thornton.

"Impossible, my dear, I am sorry to say. The book was lying quite at the other end of the table, and it was shut. Now I think of it," continued Mr. Thornton, after a short pause, "I feel certain it must have been done on Tuesday. I recollect that when I came afterwards to fetch the ink-bottle, being surprised that there was so little ink left. I had felt so sure that it was nearly full in the morning. Helen and Mary, you were both in the library, I remember, at the time,—do you recollect my fetching the bottle?"

"No, papa, I did not know you did," said Mary. And indeed she had been so busy with her portico, that she had not noticed it.

Helen had noticed it, as we know, but she thought it best to say as Mary did, and she also denied having seen anything about it. When once we leave truth, there is no saying how far we may wander from it.

"Both of you children were in the library that day; we must find out who was there besides," said Mr. Thornton. "If neither of you threw over the ink, some one else must;—somebody must have done it. Will you inquire among the servants, my dear?"

Mrs. Thornton left the room to do so.

CHAPTER III.

NONE of the servants, it appeared, had been in the library that day but the housemaid. She of course denied having thrown over the ink, and no one thought of doubting her word, for she was a trustworthy woman,

who had been for years in the family. Besides, she had been in the library quite early, before eight o'clock in the morning, and Mr. Thornton had not brought the ink there till after ten, so it was quite impossible that she could have met with the accident.

Mr. and Mrs. Thornton were beginning to feel uneasy lest the little girls might know more about it than they chose to confess, when Nurse Freeman came down to say that she had sent Sally into the library on Tuesday morning, between eleven and twelve o'clock, to look for the bow of Miss Helen's sash which she had lost, and which she thought might have dropped off in the library the evening before. That Sally had been a long time looking for it, and that when she, Nurse Freeman, had scolded her for her delay, she had seemed very much confused.

"Send for Sally," said Mr. Thornton.

Sally soon made her appearance, looking very much frightened.

"Sally," said Mr. Thornton, "were you in the library on Tuesday?"

"No, sir—yes, sir—I mean, I went to fetch Miss Mary to have her frock tried on."

"Did not Mrs. Freeman send you there between eleven and twelve to look for something?"

"Yes, sir," said Sally, colouring up; but I could not find it."

"You were a long time in the library, Mrs. Freeman says; what were you doing all the time? Now recollect, and speak the truth," said Mr. Thornton, kindly.

"Please, sir, I was looking for Miss Helen's sash."

"And nothing else? Now remember!" said Mr. Thornton, warningly.

"Please, sir, I did not do anything else," replied Sally. But she looked very much confused.

"It was a long time for you to be looking for the sash. Surely, you did something else?"

Sally made no answer, but kept playing with the corner of her apron in an uncomfortable kind of manner, her eyes fixed upon

the carpet. The fact was, that when she had been sent into the library, she had amused herself with arranging her hair in different manners, and looking at herself in the large mirror between the windows, for she was rather a vain girl; and she did not like to confess it, because she would have been thought so very silly. It was this which made her feel and look so confused.

"Now, Sally, be careful how you answer. If you confess the truth, I will forgive you; but if not, and I discover that you have told me a falsehood, you will certainly leave this house."

Mr. Thornton now showed her the book.

"Did you throw the ink over this picture?" he asked. "Now, Sally, be careful how you answer. If you did, and if you will at once confess the truth, I will forgive you; but if not, and I discover that you have told me a falsehood, you will leave my house."

"No, sir," said Sally, "I never meddled with the book."

"And you did not spill the ink over it? Now mind what you say."

"No, sir, I did not," repeated Sally.

"You are quite sure?"

"Yes, sir," replied poor Sally, ready to cry.

"Very well—you may leave the room."

Sally went out, with her apron to her eyes.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Thornton, turning to his wife, "what do you think?"

"Indeed, I hardly know," she replied.

"I should not believe too much what Sally says, ma'am," said Nurse Freeman. "I am sorry to say she is very much given to fibbing. I have tried hard to cure her, and indeed she has been better lately; but still——"

"You mean, nurse," said Mr. Thornton, "that in such a case as this, when some one *must* have told a falsehood, it is but fair to lay the suspicion upon the person whose character is the least truthful; and you are quite right. When once a person has been guilty of untruth, we can no longer rely upon what they say—we cannot trust them any more."

Oh, how miserable Helen felt at these

words! But still, she had less courage now than ever to confess. She *had* told an untruth; and what would her uncle say? He would never believe her any more—so it was no use telling now; but she would never, never tell another, as long as she lived. So she thought; and so she lost another opportunity.

“Go back to your lessons now, my dears,” said Mrs. Thornton; “Miss White will be waiting for you, and we do not want you any longer.”

Mary and Helen obeyed, and had only just left the room, when some one knocked at the door.

“Who’s there?” said Mr. Thornton.

“It be only me, sir,” said a large, square, bluff-looking woman, with sleeves tucked up to her elbows, and sodden, wrinkled hands, who now opened the door. She was the laundry-maid.

“Oh, come in, Dobbs!” said Mr. Thornton.

“What do you want, my good woman?”

“Oh, sir, you see I have heard of all this

to-do about the spilling of the ink. Martha has just been into the laundry with some of missis's things, and she's been a-telling me of how everybody says nobody's done it; and of how all the servants is in a way like, for fear you, sir, or missis should be a-suspecting of any of them to have told a untruth, because it's clear some one *must* have done it. Now, sir, I'm not fond of telling tales, or the like of that,—but justice is justice,—and where there's blame, to my mind they who deserves it, be it he or she, should bear it; and so, sir, I made bold to step up with this."

So saying, she unfolded a little brown holland apron, and held it up to Mr. Thornton. It was stained with red ink; for it was this very apron which Helen had used to dry the book, though in her hurry she had not noticed what it was.

"Whose is that apron, Dobbs?" asked Mr. Thornton.

"Sally Jenkins's, sir. It came into the wash with the rest of the things on Monday—that's yesterday. She's but a young

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thing, sir," said Dobbs, as if she would make an apology for her.

"But a sad story-teller, I am afraid," said Mr. Thornton.

Dobbs curtsied, and left the room.

"This is strong proof, indeed," said Mr. Thornton.

"I am very, very sorry," said Mrs. Thornton; "I am afraid we must part with her—she seems incorrigible."

"Yes," replied Mr. Thornton; "I told her she would be sent away if she told me an untruth. This may be a lesson that she will never forget, and it may cure her of falsehood for life."

"She is a sad story-teller, indeed, ma'am," said nurse, "and very idle. She will be no loss."

"I am sorry for her poor mother," said Mrs. Thornton.

"Yes," said Mr. Thornton, "it is a sad business; but we must hope, as I said, that this will be a lesson to her, and we will endeavour to get her another place. Go and fetch her, nurse."

Nurse did so, and soon returned with her.

"Is this your apron, Sally?" asked Mr. Thornton.

"Yes, sir."

"How did these stains come upon it?"

"I don't know, sir; I didn't do it."

"Sally," said Mr. Thornton, very gravely, "I am very much afraid that you have been telling me untruths. Some one must have spilled the red ink, and I have every reason to believe it could be no one but you. You confess you were a long time in the library on Tuesday, when the accident must have happened, because it was the only day on which red ink was in the room. You can give no account of what you were doing all that time, and we find your apron all over stains of red ink. If you had a good character for being a truthful girl, I would have believed you in spite of all these appearances to the contrary. But you have not; you have very little regard for truth,—and therefore I do *not* believe you. I believe that you threw the ink over the book, and I discharge

you from my service—not on account of the accident, but because you are a story-teller.”

Sally burst into tears.

“ I didn’t do it, sir—I didn’t indeed !” she sobbed.

“ I am very sorry, Sally,” said Mr. Thornton; “ but I cannot believe one who is so much in the habit of falsehood.”

“ I know I have often told stories, sir,” sobbed Sally again; “ but I am not telling one this time, indeed, sir; and I won’t do so any more, if you will please not to send me away.”

“ It is useless your saying any more about it. There is every proof that you *did* throw over the ink, and you had much better confess it at once, instead of persisting in denying it,” said Mr. Thornton. “ I can forgive anything but obstinate persisting in what is false. I hope this will be a lesson to you, and that you may be a truthful girl for the future; but you cannot stay any longer in my house. If you improve, I have no doubt Mrs. Thornton will try and get you another place.”

“ Oh, what will father say !” cried Sally.

"Oh, he will be so angry with me! And mother!"

"Yes, your poor mother will be sadly grieved," said Mrs. Thornton; "grieved, indeed, that you should lose your place, and for such a reason! If you had recollected who it is that sees you everywhere, my dear, this would never have happened, for you would have feared his displeasure even more than your father's; and that fear would have prevented your doing anything so very wrong! You must try to be a better girl, Sally, for the future."

Sally could make no reply for crying, and Nurse Freeman, taking her by the hand, led her from the room.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the little girls went up to the nursery to dress for dessert, they heard what had happened to Sally.

Helen felt very miserable. She had never ought what her falsehood might lead to.

She had never thought that the real criminal denying the accident, and being believed, would lead to the blame being thrown upon an innocent person. If she could have known this when she threw over the ink, I do not think that she would have denied the accident, coward though she was.

Even now it was not too late; but it is very difficult to turn back when we have once done wrong; very difficult, indeed, to get into the straight road again; and as Helen listened to Mrs. Freeman's account of all that her uncle said about falsehood, and how he could forgive anything but that, she felt she had not the courage to say,

"Sally is innocent. I spoilt the book. I am the story-teller."

And then she began making excuses to herself for her conduct, and to try and comfort herself with the thought, that Sally deserved the punishment, if not this time, yet for many other times when she had told falsehoods, and that everybody said that this would be a good lesson to her, and that

perhaps it would cure her of the shocking habit, and so it would be all for the best.

But her conscience would not be comforted, nevertheless ; it would keep telling her that she had acted very wickedly ; perhaps as wickedly as a little girl of her age could act, in thus letting an innocent person suffer for her fault ; and Helen was very, very wretched ; for she was not quite so bad as not to be wretched.

She could not sleep at night for thinking of Sally, and of the rage Sally's father would be in with her when she went home the next day ; for Sally had cried very much, and had said that she knew he would beat her ; and yet she could not make up her mind to tell her uncle. At last she thought of a plan.

" Mary," she called, softly, from her little bed, " are you asleep ? "

" No, I am just awake, Nelly ; do you want anything ? "

" No," said Helen. And then, after a pause, " I have been thinking of poor Sally, Mary. I'm so afraid her father will beat her."

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"So am I. Nurse says she deserves it. But it must be such a dreadful thing to be beaten. I do not think papa would ever beat us,—do you, Nelly?"

"No, I don't think he would. May I come into your bed, Mary?"

"Oh, yes, do. Here is plenty of room. Bring your pillow, Nelly. It is quite early, and we can have such a nice talk before Martha comes to call us."

Helen jumped out of her own little bed, and in another moment was in Mary's.

"I wonder whether we could prevent Sally's father from beating her?" Helen said, in a little while.

"Oh, I wish we could; but how could we?" asked Mary. "He would not mind two little girls like us."

"No; but I have been thinking that perhaps if we gave him some money—you know, Mary, I have a whole sovereign in my desk left of what papa sent me;—and perhaps if we were to give it to Sally's father he would not beat her."

"Oh, Helen, I wish I had some money left. I spent it all for Maurice's desk. Oh, I am so sorry! I should like to have had some to give to poor Sally's father."

"I dare say my sovereign will do," said Helen.

"Oh, but Helen, you will have no money left for yourself!"

"I don't mind that a bit," replied Helen; "if only Sally is not beaten."

"Oh, darling Helen," cried Mary, kissing her, "how good you are!"

Did Mary's praise give Helen any pleasure? No; only pain.

"I am not good," she said; and she could not help crying.

Mary thought it was because she was so sorry for Sally, and only loved her the more for being so kind.

"How must we manage it?" asked Helen, when she could speak again.

"We will ask mamma to give it to him," said Mary.

"No," replied Helen, "I don't like to do

that. She will praise me, perhaps ; and I do not want to be praised."

This was so unlike Helen, that Mary looked at her in astonishment.

"I should like to give it myself, when we go out walking. Might not we go to Mrs. Jenkins? I dare say nurse would let us, if we asked her; and then I could give the money to Sally's father, and beg him not to beat her," continued Helen.

And so it was agreed that they should ask nurse to take them to Mrs. Jenkins's cottage when they went out for their morning's walk.

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. Freeman made no objection when Mary told her, after breakfast, as she was putting on her walking-things, where they wanted to go, more particularly when she heard of Helen's plan.

Mary begged that nurse would not men-

tion that she had told her, as Helen did not want to be praised ; and nurse thought what a dear little generous thing Miss Helen was, after all, in spite of her many faults, and how nice it was of her to wish to keep her good actions so secret.

And now they were all dressed and ready ; the two little ones were lifted upon their donkeys, and away they started upon their walk.

It was a beautiful autumn morning. The sun shone bright and warm upon the trees, which had already changed their dark green summer liveries into every shade of brown, and red, and yellow. The grass was still wet and sparkling with the heavy autumn dew in the shade ; but where the sun could reach, it was quite dry, and Helen and Mary might stray from the path which led across the park to the village, without being called back by Mrs. Freeman's—

“ Take care, young ladies, keep to the road ; you will wet your feet ! ”

The birds had nearly given over singing

now ; but to make up for them, the nuts and blackberries were getting ripe, and the pretty little red squirrel might be seen scampering across the road, with its tail stretched straight behind it, disturbed by the approach of the little party ; and scouring up the nearest tree, as quick as light, would pause to look down upon them from one of the topmost branches.

When they left the park, they came into a pretty lane which led to Mrs. Jenkins's cottage. A clear, sparkling rivulet ran on one side of this lane,—it was the same which ran through the wood, and at the foot of the moss hut ;—on the other side was a high sandy bank, overhung with copse-wood, the wild cherry-tree, the crab, hazels, and brambles. This bank was broken into hollows and little caves ; here in spring were to be found the first primroses and violets and the earliest birds'-nests ; in summer the finest wild strawberries ; and now Mary was hunting for nuts and blackberries, which she brought to nurse and the two little ones, wondering why Helen did not come and help her

as usual, instead of walking so quietly by the side of the donkey. Helen was too unhappy to enjoy herself.

If she had been truthful and courageous, all this misery would have been saved. Her uncle would no doubt have been angry with her for her disobedience in meddling with what she had been told not to touch, but then he would have been so much pleased with her candour in at once confessing what she had done, that he would soon have forgiven her, and she now might have been running about gay and happy with Mary; and better than all, poor Sally would still be in the nursery, and not going home in disgrace.

But it was too late now, she foolishly thought,—but it is never too late to do well,—too late now. Her uncle would never, never forgive her if he knew how badly she had behaved, and her aunt Eleanor, too, her dear aunt Eleanor, would never love her any more. And Mary! Mary, who was so good and so truthful—and Maurice, what would they think of her—what would they
? Oh, no! she could not—she dared

not tell! Not now; it was too late! If she had only confessed all in the library,—if she had even told when she found that Sally was going to be punished. But now!—oh no, she could not!

They had now reached the cottage. It stood back in a little garden, which was separated from the lane by a paling. This paling was broken and untidy, and the gate which led through it hung half on and half off its hinges. The garden was very untidy, overgrown with weeds, and trampled by the neighbours' pigs, which, feeding in the lane, made their way through the gaps in Jenkins's fence. Jenkins flew into terrible passions with the pigs and his neighbours, but he never thought of driving a nail or two into his paling. It was all the fault of the pigs and his neighbours, he declared, that his garden was so untidy. "What was the good of planting anything to be eaten up by the pigs?" he would ask, in a rage, when his wife would timidly ask him to plant a few potatoes and cabbages.

Mrs. Jenkins was a tidy, decent woman

herself, but her spirit was almost broken by her drunken husband, and she had hardly the heart to keep her cottage as clean and neat as it was. She supported herself and her good-for-nothing husband by needle-work, for he was too idle to work much himself, and what he did earn was sure to be spent in the public-house. "If there isn't Mrs. Freeman, and the young ladies and the children!" she now exclaimed, as she looked up from her work, at the sound of their voices at the gate; and throwing it down she ran to open it for them.

"Well, it's long since I have seen you, nurse," she said, "and the young ladies and Master Willy—bless his dear heart, how he grows;—will you please step in, Miss Mary, and Miss Helen?"

"Oh, nurse, I forgot you can't leave the donkey, and I have no one I can ask to hold it," she went on, looking eagerly about. "How is it Sally is not with you this morning, nurse?"

Nurse looked very grave, and shook her head.

"She's not ill, maybe?" exclaimed Mrs. Jenkins.

"No, she's not ill," said nurse, mysteriously.

"Then, dear heart! what's the matter?" asked the poor mother; "she hasn't been a bad girl?"

"She has, then," said nurse; "but don't take on, Mrs. Jenkins"—for Mrs. Jenkins looked ready to cry. "This will be a lesson to her, and I dare say she will be a good girl for the time to come; and I am sure missis will find her another place."

"Another place!" cried Mrs. Jenkins; "why sure she's not going to be sent away?"

Mrs. Freeman shook her head sorrowfully.

"What has she been doing?" asked Mrs. Jenkins, eagerly. "She hasn't been breaking any more of the tea-things?"

"Why, as for that, Mrs. Jenkins, you know poor Sally is a sad careless girl, and not a week passes but that something or other is damaged; but I should make no complaints of that to my mistress, because Sally is but a young thing yet, and she

might improve. I will not say that she has *not* improved. No ; it is not on account of breakages of tea-cups that she is going to leave."

" Oh, I was sure you would be too good to get her sent away for the like of that, Mrs. Freeman, and my dear mistress too. But what has she been doing? I am quite in a worrit till I hear. Oh, I hope it is not anything very bad ! She has not been scolding the children,—or hit them, perhaps? Young girls are apt to be impatient, I know."

" Hit the children !" exclaimed Mrs. Freeman, " I should think not, indeed ! I would take good care of that, Mrs. Jenkins ! And Sally, to do her justice, would never have thought of such a thing for one single moment—that I'll answer for."

" Then, dear heart, what is it? Tell me, for goodness' sake !"

" Why, then, Mrs. Jenkins, I am very sorry to say, Sally has been telling stories again ; and this time it came to my master's

knowledge, and he said she must stay no longer."

Poor Mrs. Jenkins covered her face with her apron, and burst into tears.

Mrs. Freeman was very kind, and tried to console her as best she could; but this was not easy to do; for it was a sad thing for Sally, and her mother loved her very much.

Mrs. Freeman related how it had all happened, as soon as Mrs. Jenkins was able to listen; or rather how it was supposed to have all happened, for we know that it was not really Sally who had spilt the ink.

"You see, Mrs. Jenkins," nurse continued, when she had come to the end of her relation,—“you see there is nothing master is more particular about than about truth. I really hardly think he could forgive one of his own children if they were to tell him a story, though he is so kind and fond of them. And sure enough there's not one of them, from Master Maurice down to little Miss Florence, who would ever think of saying a thing that was not true, however they might

be punished. I have lived in the family now these thirteen years,—that is before Master Maurice was born,—and I should no more think of doubting anything any one of them was to tell me, than I should doubt that the sun would go down this very night.”

“Bless them!” sobbed Mrs. Jenkins, “it’s very true—very true. But still, as my Sall does deny it so stoutly as you say, perhaps she did not throw the ink over, after all.”

If any one had watched Helen’s face at this speech, they would have seen it turn suddenly pale. But no one looked at her; they were all too much interested in what was going on.

“I am surprised at you, Mrs. Jenkins!” exclaimed Nurse Freeman; “quite surprised that you should doubt the thing, after the apron and all, and she—I am sorry to say it, Mrs. Jenkins, very sorry—such a storyteller!”

“She mayn’t have done it, all the same,” persisted Mrs. Jenkins, removing the apron from her flushed face. “I don’t believe

Sally would dare to tell Mr. Thornton a story to his face. It's very different from telling you one, Mrs. Freeman."

"I cannot see much difference," replied nurse; "and if you do not believe she did it, after all the proofs I have told you, who do you think did do it, pray?"

"I can't say—I can't say," replied Mrs. Jenkins, her courage deserting her, and again bursting into tears; "I suppose she must have done it. Time will tell, perhaps. But what will become of my poor girl!"

"Don't distress yourself, my dear woman," said Mrs. Freeman; "missis will see and find her another place, I am sure."

"Missis is very kind, and pray give my duty to her. But it was not so much of the place I was thinking of; I was thinking of what Sally's father would say! Oh, he will be in such an awful rage, at having the poor child back upon our hands! He will beat her, I am certain sure he will."

"Well, it will be a lesson to Sally if he does," said Mrs. Freeman, "and will cure

her for life of her shocking habit. You must not be so tender-hearted." Nurse was rather a severe woman herself.

Mrs. Jenkins made no answer, but still cried, with her apron over her face. Mary and Helen could bear it no longer. Helen could not speak, but Mary ran up to Mrs. Jenkins, and tried to pull the apron from her face.

"Don't cry—don't cry," she said, while the tears stood in her own eyes. "Look, Mrs. Jenkins, Helen has got a sovereign—a whole sovereign!—and she will give it to Mr. Jenkins, that he may not beat Sally."

"Bless your dear heart," Miss Mary, cried Sally's mother, stooping down, and snatching Mary up in her arms; "you are the dearest, kindest little lady, that ever was in this world. And would you really give all that money to save my poor girl from being beaten?"

"It is not me," said Mary, "it is Helen—it is Helen's money."

Helen stood at a little distance. She had

slipped the sovereign into Mary's hand to give to Mrs. Jenkins ; she could not give it herself.

" It is very kind of you, indeed, Miss Helen," said Mrs. Jenkins, who had released Mary, and now went up to Helen ; " very, very kind ! And I thank you, miss, with my whole heart, I am sure. But I do not like to take your money, miss. Maybe your papa would not like it, if he was to know ;" and she held the sovereign to Helen.

" Oh, yes, he would—he would !" exclaimed Helen, hurriedly pushing Mrs. Jenkins's hand and the money away. " You must take it ! I don't want it at all—I brought it here on purpose !"

" Then you are a dear, good, kind young lady ! If you only knew, miss, how grateful I am, and poor Sally too ! But I can't tell you, miss—I only wish I could !" And the poor woman wiped away the tears from her eyes.

Mrs. Freeman felt her's moist, but she said, in a cheerful tone,—

"Well, we must think how it is to be managed. Will you give your husband the money and tell him, or shall Miss Helen, or shall I?"

"Oh, not me—not me for the wide world—he would only laugh at me!" exclaimed Mrs. Jenkins. But yonder he comes; and if Miss Helen would have the great goodness to speak to him——"

Helen felt very much frightened when she saw the great, big, red-faced, ill-looking man, who now came up the lane; but Mrs. Jenkins slipped the money into her hand, saying,

"Now, miss, now!"

And Mary said,

"Come, Nelly, I will go with you!" So she had no time for hesitation, for Mary seized her hand, and drew her with her to the gate, where Jenkins now stood with his pipe in his mouth.

He sulkily touched his hat, and made way for the two little girls, thinking they wanted to pass. Mary grew red—Helen turned very pale, as she began, timidly:—

"Mr. Jenkins, we want to speak to you."

"What's your will?" said he, in a gruff voice, and looking very much surprised at being addressed.

"We want you not to beat Sally, and here's a sovereign," said Helen.

"Who told you I beat Sally, miss? What should I want to beat Sally for, eh?"

"We thought you might, because she is coming home," said Mary.

"Coming home! What be she coming home for?" he growled. "And if she be, I suppose she'll be going back again."

"Papa has sent her away," said Mary.

"Sent her away!" thundered Jenkins. And then, remembering to whom he was speaking, he said, in rather a milder tone,

"What is she sent away for, little miss? What tricks has she been after again?"

"She told a story," said Mary; "and, oh, Mr. Jenkins, Helen and I am come to beg you will not beat her——"

"And here is a sovereign," interrupted Helen, pushing it into his hand.

The two children looked up imploringly into his face as they spoke, and the tears stood in their eyes.

"Told a story again, has she?" said Jenkins. "Well, if she doesn't deserve being punished, I don't know who does! To lose such a good place, little fool! and to be upon our hands again! She deserves to starve, that she does!"

"And so you don't want me to beat her, little miss," he continued, with a laugh. "And if so be it's to oblige you, I don't mind letting her off this once; but as to taking the money, I'll have nought to do with the like of that—it's like selling one's own flesh and blood, you see; and I'm not quite so bad as that comes to, though I believe I'm none of the best. So here, miss, here's your money." And, forcing it into Helen's hand, he put his pipe into his mouth again, and stalked straight into the house, without saying a word to either his wife or the nurse, as he passed them.

"He didn't take the money, did he, miss?"

asked Mrs. Jenkins, eagerly, as Helen and Mary again joined them.

"No, he would not have it," said Helen, sadly.

She would have felt so much happier, she thought, if he had accepted it; so much happier to have given something,—to have denied herself something,—to atone for her fault. Perhaps you will think that she did not deserve this happiness; and I think so too. To have confessed her fault was the *true* atonement; and this, you see, she was not good and brave enough to do.

Mrs. Jenkins seemed very glad indeed that her husband had not taken Helen's money. Her face cleared up, and she said,

"Oh, I am so glad—so thankful! Poor dear Joe—he is not so bad, after all! It is all along of bad company that ruins him. He has a good heart, I know he has, if they'd only let him alone. I always says he has a good heart!"

"If he has, he keeps it pretty close to himself," said Mrs. Freeman, rather scornfully;

“and if it’s only to come out when there’s not another soul in the world to lead him astray, why it will be a pretty long time to wait, and I wouldn’t say ‘Thank you’ for such a one. Come along, children, it will be dinner-time before we get back. Good morning, Mrs. Jenkins. Sally will leave the hall after the servants’ dinner. And now take my advice: don’t go and pity her, as if there was never such an ill-used creature in the world before, but let it be a lesson to her.”

“I will, indeed, Mrs. Freeman; I will be very stiff with her, poor lass—I will, indeed;” and the tears again stood in her eyes.

“Yes, you are very likely, poor soul!” said nurse to herself, ironically. “And that is just the way children are spoiled! Don’t go so near the donkey’s heels, Miss Helen; he is very apt to kick.”

PART III.

WILLY.

CHAPTER I.

AUTUMN had nearly passed away. It was the end of October ; but the weather was still bright and warm, and the woods still clothed in their russet dress. Some of the trees, to be sure, were nearly bare ; but the delicate fibre-work of their branches, here and there, looked beautiful against the clear blue sky, and the beeches and the oaks were still thickly covered with leaves. It was very pleasant to walk in the woods on a fine morning, with the leaves rustling and crackling under foot ; or down the avenue of horse-chesnuts, which led from the house to the lodge gates. The children were very fond of playing in this avenue, and searching for the beautiful shining chesnuts amongst the

heaps of dead leaves. It was a great prize when they found one that was "piebald;" that is, brown and white, like the Shetland ponies in Mrs. Thornton's pony-carriage. It was, too, a sad grievance that these nuts so soon lost their fine gloss after they were taken out of the soft white substance which lined their thick husks. They looked at first as bright as the mahogany table in the dining-room, the children thought; but the next morning they would be quite dull, and no rubbing would restore their brightness.

Helen's idea was to keep hers in water; and, to be sure, so long as they were wet, they looked as glossy as ever, but when dry they were no better than Mary's, and, as Willy wisely observed,

"One cannot keep them in water when one wants to play with them."

Nothing of importance had happened to our children since last we took leave of them, returning home from Mrs. Jenkins's cottage.

Helen had been really very unhappy for many days after; and she had looked so pale

and so dull, that Mrs. Thornton began to be afraid she must be ill. But Sally had got another place in less than a fortnight's time; and when Helen knew this, she felt much happier, and her spirits returned again.

Sally had got a very comfortable place. She was engaged by two very good old maiden ladies, sisters, who lived in a village some distance off. They were the friends whom Mr. and Mrs. Thornton were going to visit the morning that the discovery was made of the accident with the red ink. So much delay had been occasioned by the discovery, that the visit had been put off; but a few days after, Helen and Mary were told to get ready, and they went with Mr. and Mrs. Thornton to see the ruins, and pay the visit.

Mrs. Thornton had told Sally's history to the two Miss Pattersons,—which was the name of the two ladies,—and they had very kindly proposed to engage Sally themselves, as they were in want of a girl to help in the house. They thought that she would only

get worse if left at home with her father, and that she would lose the good habits that Mrs. Freeman had taught her; and they thought that having lost her place for story-telling might have made such an impression upon her, that she would be quite cured of the sad habit for the future, if taken into a good, steady family.

So Sally went, and was very happy there, for the Miss Pattersons were very kind, and she behaved very well.

The lesson she had received of the importance of a character for truthfulness had made a deep impression upon her; and her kind mistresses, too, had convinced her how hateful is falsehood in the eyes of Him who is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life;" and Sally felt she would rather die now than "utter deceit," not because it would make her lose her place, but because it would offend her Heavenly Master.

She had persisted in her denial of having thrown over the ink, but soon everything about the accident began to be forgotten, and

no one said anything more to her about it. Her mother was the only person who believed that she was innocent. The Miss Pattersons had taken it for granted that she had done it, and had not questioned her.

Was Helen improved? you will ask me.

How could she be? She had been very sorry and very unhappy, it is true, and had determined never to do the like again, because it made her so very miserable.

But this was not the right repentance. The right repentance is always followed by reparation, as far as is possible; and what reparation had Helen made?

None.

An innocent person still remained charged with her misfortune and with her falsehood. Helen had made no confession. And every day Helen bore the consciousness of her guilt more easily. She was beginning to feel indifferent to it, almost to forget it. This is the most dreadful thing that can happen to any one—the most dangerous and the most dreadful. If we grow indifferent about our

wrong actions, and quite happy under the knowledge of their unrepaired consequences, how can we hope to grow better? We cannot grow better, we *must* grow every day worse.

And Helen did grow worse. But she did not know it, and no one else was aware of it, for her faults arose from want of honest, candid, straightforward, courageous Truth; and those she lived with were too truthful themselves to suspect her, so her fault still remained undiscovered, for no occasion of detection had yet happened.

But the time was not very far off now, a time which Helen had reason to bless, as she did, to the latest day of her life.

Mary had caught a very bad cold, and was obliged to keep her room for some days. Helen was very kind about this cold, and stayed with Mary almost all the time she was at liberty from the schoolroom, reading aloud to her, or playing with her at dominoes, draughts, or anything that Mary liked,—for we know she was a good-natured little girl, and she loved her cousin dearly.

It happened that Mrs. Freeman's niece, who lived in the neighbouring town, was going to be married to a young tradesman of the place, and as the parents of both bride and bridegroom were well to do in the world, the wedding was to be rather a gay affair. Margaret—that was the name of the young woman—was to have three bridesmaids to go with her to church; and as the bridegroom's father was a confectioner, they were to have a grand wedding-cake, with little Cupids and turtle-doves all over the top, and a wreath of orange-flowers round it. Margaret's mother thought it would be quite amiss if she did not give a little feast to do honour to and set off this fine cake, so she invited her friends and relations to come to it, and Mrs. Freeman of course was asked amongst the number. Mrs. Freeman wished very much to go, as Margaret was her favourite niece, and besides, she was rather fond of a party now and then. The only difficulty was this illness of Mary's, which she thought would prevent her going.

Mary was, however, doing so very well, that Mrs. Thornton told her that she might accept the invitation, as there could no longer be any anxiety upon her account. So upon the day of the wedding Mrs. Freeman went away quite early, dressed in her best brown silk gown, and with her bonnet trimmed with plenty of white satin ribbon. The coach passed the lodge at half-past eight o'clock in the morning, and this coach would set her down at her sister's door, and bring her home again at night.

Whilst she was away, Martha was to take care of the children. Helen said she would wait upon Mary, and Miss White gave her a whole holiday for the purpose.

Mary got up this day for the first time, but she was not allowed to leave her room, though the day was very fine; it was, however, quite enjoyment enough for one day, she thought, to leave her bed, of which she had got heartily tired.

"And Helen," she said, when she was dressed and seated on a comfortable chair by

the fire, wrapped in a warm shawl; "we can play with the dear bricks again now—I am so tired of draughts and dominoes."

"Will not it tire you?" asked Helen.

"Oh no, not a bit!—go and fetch them, then, there is a dear Nelly."

"I will presently," replied Helen, who did not show her usual readiness to oblige her cousin in this instance.

"I cannot think why you never seem to care about the bricks now," said Mary; "you used to be as fond of them as I am, almost; but now you never play with them. I cannot think what is the reason, Helen!"

"Oh yes," said Helen, "I like them pretty well, only I think they are so stupid!"

"Oh, Helen, how can you think them stupid? I think they are by far the most amusing of all our playthings—and you used to think so too."

"Oh," replied Helen, "people change their mind sometimes, Mary; I have got tired of them, I suppose."

"You have never played with them since

the day Sally spilt the red ink, I remember," said Mary; "what a long time ago that seems now, does it not? Don't you recollect what a beautiful portico I invented whilst I was having my frock tried, and you were waiting for me in the library.—Oh, Nelly dear! you will poke all the fire out!"

Helen had taken up the poker in her confusion, and was really doing what Mary said. She now dropped it, and went towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Mary.

"I am going for the kettle-holder I am working," replied Helen.

"Oh please bring the bricks then," said Mary, "I want to try whether I can remember that portico; you can help me, Helen, can't you?"

"Very well," said Helen, and she made her escape from the room. She could not yet feel anything than very uncomfortable whenever the subject of the red ink was mentioned.

She presently returned with her work and

the box of bricks, and drawing the table before Mary's chair, she placed it upon it before her, and sitting down on the chair at the other side of the fire, she began to work.

Mary turned the bricks out of the box and began to build. "I cannot remember!" at length she exclaimed, sinking back quite discouraged in her chair; "and I do so want! Nelly, dear, please put down your kettle-holder and come here. Do tell me; was it this way?—or this way?" arranging the bricks in different manners as she spoke.

"I do not know—I do not recollect," answered Helen.

"Oh, but you are not looking! Do come here, please!"

Helen got up at this, and came to the table.

"Now was it so?—or so?" repeated Mary.

"Like that, I think," answered Helen.

"Oh no! it could never have been like that!" said Mary, laughing; "it would have been an odd sort of a portico if it had been like that!"

"Then I don't know how it was at all!" cried Helen, quite pettishly.

Mary looked at her in surprise. She had been so very gentle and good-natured all the time of her illness, that she had almost forgotten that Helen could be pettish. She did not ask her any more questions about the portico, but said, as she looked to the window—

"What a beautiful day it is! The sun is shining so bright, and the sky is as blue as if it was summer! Would not you like to go out, Helen? I am sure you must be quite tired of staying indoors."

"But you will want me," said Helen.

"Oh no, I shan't; I can amuse myself very well with the bricks till you come back."

"But I am so afraid you will be dull," continued Helen; "you know Aunt Eleanor will not be back till quite late, as she is gone to spend the day with the Miss Pattersons."

"Oh no! I shall not be dull at all. Do go!"

"Very well; I shall not stay out very long:" and Helen left the room, by no means sorry to have a run in the nice fresh air.

CHAPTER II.

HELEN went to the nursery to have her walking things fastened, and found that Martha was preparing to take Florence and Willy their afternoon walk,—or rather ride, for they generally went out on their donkeys. This afternoon, however, they found only Willy's donkey waiting for them at the hall-door.

“How comes this?” asked Martha.

“Miss Florence's donkey is gone to be shod; he has cast a shoe,” said the groom, “and he has not come back yet. It is market-day at Bradworth”—that was the name of the nearest town—“and I suppose that is the reason Tom is so late bringing him back, for I am sure I sent him early enough.”

“Well, never mind,” said Martha; “lift Master Willy upon his saddle, John,—I will carry Miss Florence.”

“Who is to mind the reins, then?” asked John.

"Oh, to be sure, I had forgotten that!" replied Martha, looking quite perplexed.

"Oh, let me, Martha," exclaimed Helen; "I shall like it so much."

"You must, please miss, mind and not let go the reins, then," said John, arranging the bridle and putting it into her hand; "and don't try and make Nettle gallop, for though he is as sweet-tempered as a lamb, he is apt to be frolicsome now and then."

Helen said she would be very careful, and the little party set off. Helen walked at Nettle's head, holding the bridle, while Martha followed, carrying little Florence. When they got upon the short, soft grass of the park, however, Florence begged to be set down that she might run about a little; she was quite tired of being carried, she said, and wanted to gather the flowers. Flowers, to be sure, there were not many at this season of the year, but Florence spied a few daisies and clover blossoms, and they were quite enough to satisfy her. So Martha set her down upon the grass. "You had best

go on a little gently, Miss Helen," she said ; " we shall never be able to keep pace with you now, however slowly you make the donkey walk."

" And I do not like to go very slowly," cried Willy; " I want to go to that pretty place where the nuts are, and the big blackberries. I know there are some left ; I saw some when I went that way yesterday. Please, Nelly, let us go there !"

" May we, Martha," asked Helen.

" I don't know, Miss Helen, I'm sure," replied Martha, doubtfully ; " it is a good way down the park where Master Willy means, and perhaps you might be tired of guiding the donkey."

" Oh no, she won't !" cried Willy, jumping up and down in his saddle with impatience ; " besides, I can guide Nettle myself. Just loose the reins, Nelly ; I don't see why any one should hold the reins. I was four yesterday, and papa called me his little man, and if I am a man I don't want a girl to hold my donkey's bridle." Helen and Martha

laughed, and so did little Florence, though she did not know why.

"Don't laugh! don't laugh!" exclaimed Willy. "I don't like it—I tell you I will be a man!"

"Yes, that you will, sure enough, Master Willy," said Martha, "if you only live long enough;" and she could hardly help laughing again. "Well, Miss Helen," she continued, "I do not think there can any harm come of your going on steadily to the little copse. I will follow with Miss Florence when she is tired of walking; for you see it is impossible to get on as fast as you do, with the little thing stopping at every step; and if I do not, why you can come back quietly home, I suppose."

"Oh, yes," said Helen, "I will take care of Willy—you need not be afraid, Martha;" and so saying, she walked on, leading the donkey behind her.

"I should very much like to hold the bridle all myself, Nelly," said Willy, after

they had walked on a little way. "Just loose it, please."

"Oh, no," replied Helen; "you are too little, Willy."

"No, I am not too little!" cried Willy, indignantly. "When I go out with papa, he lets me hold the bridle all myself. Loose, loose, Nelly;" and he shook the reins impatiently.

"Well, I will when you get to the copse," said Helen. "You must be a good boy, Willy, or I must take you back to Martha."

Willy by no means approved of this prospect, so he let Helen continue to hold the bridle, and chatted away as little boys of his age generally do.

"When we get to the blackberries, Nelly," he said, "I will eat the little ones myself, and all the big ones I will put into this little basket—look—that I have brought in my hand; and I will take them to Mary. Do not you think Mary will like some, Nelly,—and some nuts? I love Mary so very much; do not you,

Nelly? And I love you too, because you are so good-natured. Won't you let me hold the bridle, Nelly?"

"No, no," said Helen; "I cannot, Willy. You know what John said before we started. You must not ask me any more."

"Very well," said Willy, "not till we get to the blackberries; then you said I might, you know. Go on, Nettle! Go on faster!" jogging up and down in his saddle. "Make him go faster, Nelly."

Helen walked on faster, pulling the donkey by the bridle.

"Down that path, Nelly," said Willy. "You are not going the right way—there, that is right! Oh, look at the deer, how they scamper away! You silly deer, to be so frightened of a poor little donkey! I wonder whether they are afraid of me or Nettle, Helen! I wish they would stop a little—I want to see them close, and they never will let me. Oh, there they are, standing quite still at the top of that hill!"

"That is not a hill, Willy," said Helen,

laughing; "it is a hillock,—a little bank. How pretty they look, do not they, with their horns against the blue sky?"

"Oh, how I wish they would let me stroke them!" sighed Willy. "I wonder why the deer, and the birds, and the pretty little squirrels, are always so frightened. I should so like to see them quite close—to hold them in my hand, or stroke them. I would be so kind to them, and not hurt them a bit; but they always get away from me so fast, even when I hold out a bit of bread to them! They never will come and let me play with them—I wonder why, Nelly!"

"Perhaps they are afraid of being shot," replied Helen. "You know Uncle Thornton and the gamekeeper shoot the partridges and the deer, and they are not sensible enough to know that you are too little a boy to shoot with a gun."

"Yes, but papa and Grove never shoot the squirrels and the bullfinches, and they are just as frightened as the deer and the partridges. Yesterday, in the garden, I saw

a bullfinch,—mamma told me it was a bullfinch. Oh, Helen, it was so pretty! He had a head, black—black—oh, as black as mamma's velvet gown! And such a pretty pink breast, and a gray back,—mamma said it was gray,—for I did not know what colour it was,—and such clean white feathers at the top of his tail! He was playing about in the cherry-tree. Mamma said he was catching little insects for his dinner, because you know there are no cherries now. I tried to whistle to him, and talked to him, and coaxed him; but he would not come down to me, though I am sure he knew what I said, because he looked down at me with his little bright eyes so sensibly. Then I ran into the house for a bit of bread to throw to him; but when I came back, he was quite gone."

"Oh, I should like to have seen him!" said Helen. "I have never seen a bullfinch. But which way must we go now, Willy? See, the path divides into two!"

Willy looked rather perplexed. First he thought it was the path to the left; and

Helen led Nettle down it a few yards. Then he was sure that that was not the way ; and Helen must turn back, and try the right-hand path.

“ Oh, yes,” cried Willy, when they had gone down it a little way, “ this is right ! I remember that old tree, with the bench under it ; Florence’s saddle got wrong, and we stopped to put it right. We shall soon be there now, Nelly. You can see the place—on this side—look ! where those bushes are.”

A few more minutes brought them to the little copse, which formed the boundary of the park on that side. It was entered by a little gate, and there was a pretty winding path through it to the open fields beyond. It was full of nut-trees and blackberry-bushes, which, being in so secluded a spot, had not suffered much from the depredations of the village children.

“ Oh, there are beauties—beauties ! ” cried Willy, in an ecstasy. “ Oh, Nelly, you must let me get off, that I may gather them ! Look, look ! ”

"Oh, Willy, indeed you must sit still," said Helen. "If you were to get off, I could never lift you on again! Now be a good boy, and sit still."

"Very well, I will—I will. But do gather some, Nelly, and put them into my basket."

"Yes, yes," said Helen, "as soon as I have fastened Nettle to this little tree. There! now you are quite safe, Willy; so give me your basket, and I will gather some blackberries."

Willy handed it to her, and she was soon amongst the brambles, plucking handfuls of the ripe, glossy fruit, with which she filled Willy's little basket.

"Now, Willy," she said, "I have filled the basket, we will go back to meet Martha and Florence. You can eat some as we go on;" and she unfastened the bridle.

"No, I shall not eat one," said Willy; "they are all such beauties! I shall take them all to Mary!"

"That is a good little boy!" said Helen.

Willy settled himself satisfactorily in his

saddle at this praise, and they turned out of the copse through the little gate again.

"We will not go back quite the same way, Willy," said Helen; "it is always so dull to go back the same way. We will try this path; it will lead us to the house just as well, I am sure."

Willy desired nothing better than to go a fresh road, and perhaps prolong the ride; and accordingly they proceeded steadily along the path Helen had chosen, which led through a number of scattered hawthorn-trees, till Willy suddenly exclaimed,—

"Look—look, Helen! a bullfinch! There — there — just before us — on that little bush!"

"Where—where?" cried Helen, eagerly. "Oh, yes, I see it. Hush—hush; don't make a noise, Willy, or you will frighten it away."

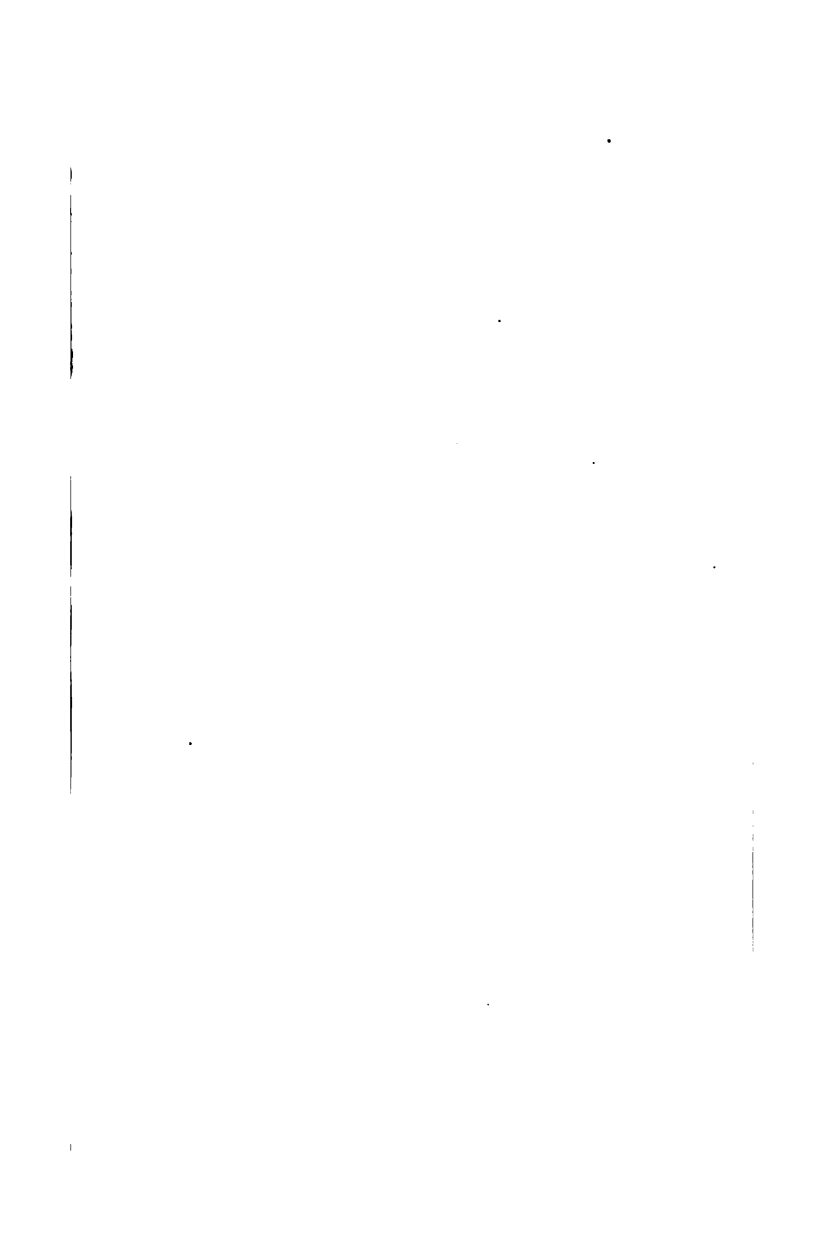
"Is not he pretty?" said Willy, in a whisper.

"I can hardly see him," answered Helen, in the same tone. "Ah, he has flown to

that other bush ! Here, Willy, just take the bridle for a minute ; I will creep, creep round and look at him. He is perched on that twig. I shall be able to catch a good view of him if I go round that tree."

So saying, she put the bridle into Willy's hands.

Willy's fingers eagerly clutched this so earnestly-coveted object of his ambition, and Helen stole away round the trunk of the tree. She just caught a glimpse of the bullfinch, who fluttered away to another low bush as she approached. She followed it. Away flew the bird again, as if wishing to entice her from her charge. She was so engrossed in the pursuit, that she gave neither a look or a thought to Willy, till she heard the noise of the donkey's feet going off at a rapid pace. She then turned back, and saw Nettle galloping off at a rapid pace along the path. Willy's hat had fallen off ; his long, fair hair was blowing about his face, and he was grasping tight by the saddle. The bridle had escaped from his hands, and was dangling about





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Nettle's legs. He seemed frightened, and was leaning all on one side, for the saddle was turning.

All this Helen saw in a moment, and in great alarm she ran after the fugitives as fast as she possibly could; but they were already some way ahead, and it was impossible for her to overtake them before the saddle, turning quite round, precipitated Willy upon the ground. Gasping for breath, Helen reached the spot where he lay.

"Willy, Willy, are you hurt?" she cried.

"Oh, yes, I am, Nelly; Nettle kicked me," said poor little Willy, trying very hard not to cry; "but don't mind, Nelly," seeing her face of alarm and concern. "Catch Nettle—we will go home."

Nettle was browsing upon some brambles a little further on.

"Get up, dear Willy," said Helen, "and let us go to him."

Willy rose from the ground with difficulty.

"Oh, it hurts!" he exclaimed.

"What hurts?" asked Helen, anxiously.

"My head! He kicked my head."

"Oh, what shall we do!" cried Helen.
"If you are hurt, what will they say! What will Aunt Thornton say! She will be angry with me for loosing the bridle. Oh, that horrid bullfinch! Oh, Willy, what did you do to the donkey to make him run away?"

"I only kicked him a little with my heels, to pretend I had spurs. Oh, Helen, my head hurts so!"

"Darling boy!" cried Helen, kissing him.
"Never mind, it will soon be well! Sit still a little while on this nice soft grass, and I will go and catch Nettle."

She did so, for Nettle made no resistance, and allowed himself to be quietly led back to Willy. But now the difficulty arose how to get him upon the saddle again.

Helen repeatedly tried to lift him up, but in vain. Willy made desperate efforts to assist himself, by clinging to the donkey's neck, as Helen lifted him; but he could not succeed in reaching Nettle's back. Besides, the saddle had turned, and even if Willy had

mounted, he would in all probability have been unable to keep his seat.

Quite exhausted, and her face flushed with exertion, Helen at length gave over the attempt.

"How is your head now, Willy?" she asked.

"Oh, it is better—a bit, I think," he answered.

"If nobody comes by to help us, we shall have to walk home, I am afraid. Shall you be able, Willy?"

"Oh, yes—quite able!" he answered. "Don't let us wait—let us go home—I want to get home!"

"Very well," said Helen; and, taking the donkey's bridle in one hand, and Willy's hand in the other, they proceeded slowly along the path towards the house, which was now visible at a little distance.

As this distance lessened with every step they took, Helen's fears of being found fault with,—nay, perhaps of being severely blamed,—returned with increased force.

"Willy," she said, "I do not think you had better say anything of your fall."

"Why?" he asked.

"Oh, because—because—perhaps I shall get very much blamed. You must not tell, Willy. Besides, Aunt Thornton and nurse are both out, so there will be nobody to tell but Martha; and it does not matter about telling Martha, you know—she is only under-nurse. You would not like to get me scolded, would you, Willy dear?"

"Oh no, indeed I would not, Nelly," said little Willy.

"Very well, then don't tell, there's a darling boy. Your head will be quite well to-morrow morning, and you will only frighten Martha if you tell her, and perhaps they will never let you ride Nettle again."

Willy was but a little boy, only just four years old, much too young to dream of there being any harm in doing as his cousin told him. She did not ask him to tell an untruth, only not to say he had had a fall. He loved her very much, and could not bear

that she should be scolded ; he loved Nettle very much, and could not bear to have his rides put an end to. So, with the utmost innocence of wrong, he promised to say nothing about the accident.

CHAPTER III.

INSTEAD of entering the house by the front entrance, Helen led Willy and the donkey to a glass side-door which opened into the garden at the foot of the nursery stairs. Here she fastened Nettle to a large standard rose-tree, and took Willy into the nursery.

Florence was having her tea.

"I am sorry, Miss Helen," began Martha, "that I could not meet you, but I hope you are not tired with being out so long with the donkey. Miss Florence began crying for her tea, so I was obliged to take her home to give it to her. Why, Master Willy, how pale you look !"

"Oh, he wants his tea!" said Helen hurriedly, "don't you Willy? We have been out a long time; I dare say he is tired."

"Here then," said Martha, setting Willy's chair and filling his cup with milk; "come dear, and take your tea. Miss Mary wanted you to go to her, if you please, Miss Helen, as soon as you came in."

"Oh my blackberries!" exclaimed Willy, "my beautiful blackberries! Oh, Helen! I must have dropped them when——"

"Well, never mind," Helen interrupted him; "I will tell Mary that you gathered them for her, and that you spilt them on the way."

"Oh, my head!" cried poor Willy, putting his hand suddenly to it.

"What is the matter with it, dear?" asked Martha, tenderly.

"It hurts me very much, Martha. I want to go to bed."

"What already!" exclaimed Martha; "why what ails the dear child? Oh, there is Miss Mary's bell! Would you please mind

the children, Miss Helen, a moment, while I go and see what your cousin is wanting?"

"Yes, yes," replied Helen, "and tell her, Martha, that I will come to her directly you come back."

Martha left the room, and Helen endeavoured to persuade Willy to finish his tea; but the poor little fellow could not eat a bit. He drank his cup of milk, however, and then getting off his chair, sat down on the floor by the window. He looked very much flushed now. Helen, in her ignorance, thought that the beautiful rosy colour was a sign he was quite well. She had been frightened by his paleness, but now that was gone, she felt quite at ease about him.

Florence required a good deal of attention, and Helen was still holding her cup for her to drink from, when Martha returned.

"Miss Mary wants you to go to her, if you please miss," she said; and then, looking at Willy, exclaimed, "Why, bless his heart, if he has not fallen fast asleep on the floor! Dear child, how tired he must be! I am

afraid he was out too long upon the donkey, and the sun was hot for the time of year."

"Yes, it was very hot," said Helen.

"Well I think I had best put him to bed at once, though it is before his time, if you could only mind Miss Florence a bit longer, Miss Helen."

"Oh yes, certainly," said Helen. She was anxious to see Willy safe asleep in bed, and be assured of his silence with respect to his fall.

Martha gently lifted Willy from the floor, and proceeded to undress him. He remonstrated a little in a sleepy tone, but did not open his eyes, and before Martha could get him into bed, his hard breathing gave sign that he was again fast asleep. It was nearly six o'clock now. Helen went to Mary's room, and stayed playing with her till half-past eight, when they both went to bed as usual. Mrs. Freeman was not expected till after nine; Mrs. Thornton still later.

Helen was not much troubled in conscience when she laid her head upon her

pillow that night. She was getting *accustomed* to concealment and deceit.

Martha came to dress Helen the next morning at the usual hour. Mary was not yet allowed to get up to breakfast. As she was brushing Helen's hair, she said in a low voice,

"Master Willy is very ill, Miss."

"Very ill!" exclaimed Helen, starting suddenly round.

"Hush, miss! your aunt does not wish Miss Mary to know, for fear it might agitate her."

"But what is the matter?" whispered Helen, eagerly.

"We don't exactly know, miss. But I will tell you all about it. Mrs. Freeman came home, as was expected, about nine o'clock. She asked whether the children had been good, and all that: so I said yes, but that Master Willy had seemed tired with a long ride he had taken with you, miss, and that I had put him to bed early. So she said I was quite right. Then she asked about

Miss Mary; and then the servants' supper bell rang, and she went downstairs. I suppose she had a great deal to tell about the wedding, for she did not come up again till rather later than usual, and whilst I was sitting working in the day nursery, your aunt and uncle came home."

"Well?" said Helen.

"Your aunt came straight upstairs, to see the children before she went to bed, as usual, and passed by me to go into the sleeping nursery; but she had not been there a minute before she called to me in such a frightened kind of tone like, that I dropped my work, not even stopping to stick my needle in, and ran to her."

" 'Martha,' she said, 'what is the matter with Willy? he seems very ill.' 'Indeed, ma'am!' said I; and I went up to the bedside. Master Willy had tossed all the bed-clothes off, and was lying on his back; his eyes were wide open, but as if he could not see through them like, and his face terribly flushed. Poor missis looked as pale as death,

and had her hand upon his pulse. 'What has he been doing to-day?' said she. I told her as quick as I could about his being so tired, and about my having put him to bed early, and that he had complained of a headache. Missis looked very anxious, and said she was afraid he had got the fever. She asked whether he had been in the village that day. I said 'no,' and that you had only taken him into the park.

"Suddenly, miss, while we were standing by the bed, Master Willy began to talk,—not sensibly, but quite wild-like, poor child. He talked a deal about bullfinches, and the deer in the park. Then he suddenly shouted out, 'stop! stop!' as loud as he could, and called to you, miss, and said something about a bridle. Then he murmured something quite low; we could only catch the words 'blackberries' and 'fall.' Missis thought he might have meant the little waterfall in the copse. Did you go there, miss?"

Helen made no reply, and Martha went on—

"Dear me, miss, it was quite sad to hear

the dear child prattling away so innocent, and to see his poor eyes staring so wide, and yet he looked so pretty, with his rosy cheeks, and his beautiful curly hair all about his face? I could not help crying; but missis was too frightened to do that, I suppose, though as I said she was as white as a sheet.

“ ‘Run, Martha,’ she said; ‘run and ask your master to come up immediately, and then fetch Mrs. Freeman.’ So I did, and the next thing was for John to mount his horse and ride off for the doctor.”

“And has he been?” asked Helen, eagerly.

“Yes, miss, he was here at five o’clock this morning.”

“And what did he say was the matter with Willy?”

“Why that is the strange thing, Miss Helen,” replied Martha; “he seems quite puzzled to know what is the matter. He says he does not think that Master Willy has got the fever. He asked if he had met with any accident, and when we said ‘no,’ he seemed still more puzzled, and shook his

head, and felt the dear child's pulse again, and said it might be fever, but that he should be able to say for certain a little later in the day, when he would call again."

By this time Helen's hair was done, and her dress fastened, and Martha went away to prepare the schoolroom breakfast. Helen felt very uncomfortable. She hoped that Willy's illness would prove to be fever, but still she could not help dreading that the fall might have had something to do with it,—and she was grieved besides that Willy, pretty gay little Willy, should be laid upon a bed of suffering.

She went down to breakfast with Miss White in the schoolroom. Whilst she was there, her aunt sent for her upstairs.

CHAPTER IV.

HELEN went immediately to the day nursery, and her aunt came to her from Willy's room, which opened into it. She

looked very pale and anxious, and was still in the dress she had gone out in the day before. She had not had time to change it, for she had not left Willy's bedside till now.

"Helen, my dear," she said, "I wish you to give me an account of where you went with Willy yesterday, and what you did."

"We went to the copse, Aunt Eleanor; Willy wanted to get some blackberries for Mary. Martha said we might go."

"Do you remember whether you stopped anywhere in the sun?"

"No, we did not," said Helen; "but the sun was hot, aunt," she hurriedly added.

"And you met with no accident?—no fall? Willy did not knock his head in any way?"

"No," said Helen, colouring; "not that I know."

Willy had not *knocked* his head, she thought—the donkey had *kicked* it;—and again, as about the tulips, she comforted her uneasy conscience with the idea that she had not told a story. Now that Willy was so ill, she was more than ever determined to say

nothing about his fall, for fear people might think it had anything to do with his illness, and that she would be exceedingly blamed ; and that she was positive such a little thing as that could not have made him ill, because he had seemed quite well as they walked home—she was sure it was fever.

So thought Helen as she left the nursery, and walked slowly along the passage to Mary's room. It is very easy to make oneself think that true which one wishes to be true ; but, in spite of this, poor Willy's exclamation, " Oh, Helen, my head hurts so ! " still rang in her ears, and filled her with uneasiness.

Helen had been desired to say nothing to Mary of Willy's illness, and it was an order which she was quite willing to obey, as it was a subject she had no particular wish to talk about.

Mary was getting up when Helen came to her room, which she was not to leave till the next day.

The day was dark and gloomy, and the rain fell silently from the heavy black clouds

upon the autumn leaves. Helen felt very sad ; she hardly knew why. Mary remarked it, for Helen seemed too dull to enter into any of their games with her accustomed spirit. But Helen made her usual reply, when she did not wish to answer a direct question, that "it was nothing," and that Mary "was tiresome."

The doctor came again in the afternoon, and though Helen "was so positive" Willy's illness was *only* fever, yet she could not help feeling exceedingly anxious to know what he would say about it now.

When the doctor had been in the house some time, she thought she would go and ask, and made some excuse to Mary for leaving the room. Helen was very ingenious at finding excuses, we know. But when she got outside of Mary's door, she had not the courage to make the inquiry, and walked up and down the passage in an uneasy, uncertain manner.

Presently she heard the nursery door open : she could not see who came out, but she heard her aunt and uncle's voices in low

tones, and another voice, which she knew must be the doctor's. They seemed talking very earnestly and eagerly; and at last she caught the words,—it was the doctor, who spoke in a louder tone,—

“Are you *sure* that the child has met with no accident?”

Helen could not hear her aunt's reply, but the doctor said again,—

“Well, then, it must be fever, there can be no doubt; and you will go on with the remedies as I have directed.”

Helen heard no more, for she ran back to Mary's room, and shut the door after her.

Here she stayed till Martha came to tell her that dinner was ready, for orders had been given not to ring the bell.

“How is he?” asked Helen, eagerly, as soon as they had got into the passage.

“Oh, miss, very bad, indeed—very bad, indeed! The doctor does not seem to know well what is the matter with him. Poor dear boy! And my poor mistress, what will she do if——”

"If what?" cried Helen.

"If he should die, miss. Nurse says that the doctor says he is in great danger. She thinks he ought to be bled, but the doctor will not hear of it; he says it is the old fashion of treating fevers, and a very dangerous one. He says if poor dear Master Willy had met with an accident,—a blow, miss, or anything of that like,—he would bleed him immediately, as the only chance of saving his life; but as there has been no accident, he dares not; and so nurse says Willy will die!"

Helen burst into tears.

"Don't take on so, Miss Helen," said Martha, kindly; "don't, dear!"

"Oh, where is Aunt Eleanor!" sobbed Helen. "I want Aunt Eleanor! I must speak to Aunt Eleanor!"

"You can't, my dear, just now—indeed, you can't," said Martha; "she is too much engaged with Master Willy."

"I tell you I must see her—I will see her!" cried Helen, impetuously. "I have

something to tell her—I must see her! Go, Martha, directly—go and fetch her!”

“I can’t, indeed, Miss Helen; you must wait till she comes out of Master Willy’s room.”

“It is about Willy I want to speak to her,” almost screamed Helen; “you *must* go, Martha, you must!”

“Hush—hush, miss,” said Martha, quite alarmed at her violence; “you will disturb your cousin.”

“Oh, poor dear Willy, he will die—he will die!” cried Helen. “Aunt Eleanor! I must speak to Aunt Eleanor!”

The nursery door opened.

“Hush—hush!” said the voice of her aunt. “Who is making that noise?”

Helen started up from the floor, upon which she had fallen in her agitation, and rushing forward, seized her aunt by the gown.

“The donkey kicked him—the donkey kicked him!” she cried. “Oh, Aunt Eleanor, don’t let Willy die!”

Quick as thought, Mrs. Thornton seized Helen’s hand, and led her quickly into an

opposite room. She was almost breathless with emotion as she shut the door, and eagerly asked Helen what she meant.

Helen, with the tears streaming down her face, told her of Willy's fall, and of the kick which the donkey had given to his head.

"Ah, child, why did not you say so before? Now I fear it is too late!" And Mrs. Thornton hurried from the room, a look of agony upon her countenance, which Helen never forgot to the last day of her life.

CHAPTER V.

"Too late!"

Helen threw herself upon her knees before a chair, and buried her face in her hands; and the dreadful thought rushed upon her mind, that if, indeed, her confession had been made "too late!" she would be the cause,—yes! the *guilty* cause,—of her little cousin's death!

And then Helen thought of little Willy, and all his pretty, winning ways,—his gay

laugh, and his merry talk,—and how fond he used to be of her ; and now, perhaps, she should never see him again.

And then followed one remembrance after another of her aunt's many acts of tender kindness to herself—how she had nursed her when she had been ill—how gently reproved her when she had been naughty—how she had ever treated her with even more indulgence than she had showed to her own children ; and now, what was her reward ?

Her little boy lay dying, through Helen's fault !

Helen's head sank from the chair upon the floor, while tears,—bitter tears of grief and repentance,—gushed from her eyes, and she sobbed aloud.

Oh, that she could undo what she had done ! Willingly, she thought, would she give her life to save Willy's ! But what use was that thought now ?

Ah, children, let us beware how we do wrong ; for when we have once got into a habit of doing wrong, who can say what

may be the consequences? Who can say whether we shall be ever able to do more to amend our fault than to be *sorry*?

And what use was it now to Willy and to his mother that Helen was sorry?

A whole hour did Helen remain upon the floor, crying bitterly. At the end of that time she could cry no more, for she was quite exhausted. She sat up and listened. She heard the noise of a carriage coming rapidly up the avenue, and she ran to the window which looked to the front of the house. It was the doctor's carriage,—she knew it well,—which came up, the horses almost galloping, to the door. Then she heard the steps let down, and the door-bell ring violently. Footsteps hurried along the passage, past her door. Helen ran to it, and put her ear to the keyhole, for she dared not go out. She heard voices in eager whispers, and the nursery door open, and then close. Then all was still again.

Two whole long hours more! No one came near Helen, and she dared not go out.

The house seemed very, very still. Was Willy worse? she thought.

Helen leant her head against the window-pane, and her tears dropped silently. Oh, how miserable she felt!

The doctor's carriage had been taken round to the stables; but she now saw it come round again, and stop at the hall door. Again she heard the steps let down, and then the sound of the carriage door shutting, and the footman's voice, "All right—drive on!"

"Oh," thought Helen, "he could do nothing! He is gone! Willy is dead! I have killed him! Oh, Willy, Willy!" And she cried,—sadly, sadly.

The door opened gently. Helen started to her feet. It was Mrs. Thornton. She looked very grave—very stern; it was the first time that Helen had ever seen such an expression upon her face, and Helen hid her face in her hands.

But when Mrs. Thornton saw Helen's anguish, that stern look passed from her face, and was replaced by one of pity.

"Thank your heavenly Father, Helen," she said, "that it has pleased Him, in His mercy, to spare me my son, and you the life-long remorse of having caused your cousin's death. Willy is better!"

Helen could not speak for joy, nor meet her aunt Eleanor's eye for shame.

"I have much to say to you, my dear," Mrs. Thornton continued; "but I cannot stop now. I must go back to my child. I merely came now to tell you he was better—I thought you would be so unhappy."

"Oh, Aunt Eleanor!" was all that Helen could say; but the tone in which she said it told Mrs. Thornton better than words how much she had suffered.

"Go down to the schoolroom now, my dear," she said; "it is too cold for you here."

Helen would rather have stayed where she was, or have gone to bed. She could not bear that any one should see her face. But her aunt Eleanor had desired her to do so, and she obeyed without a word. She felt that there was not a thing in the world, at this

moment, that she would not gladly have done for her aunt Eleanor, to show her gratitude for that gentleness and kindness which Helen felt she had so ill-deserved.

So, with her eyes red and swollen with crying, and her head aching sadly, she went down to the schoolroom. She dared not lift up her eyes to Miss White's face, as she took her place at the table which was laid for tea. Miss White knew well what was the matter with Helen, for Willy's fall and Helen's deceit and falsehood could not be concealed from the whole house, as will presently be told. Miss White's manner was very grave and serious, but she did not say anything to Helen about what had happened.

Once Helen heard her uncle's voice in the passage, and she trembled when she thought he would come in. If he was to look at her even, she thought she could not bear it; and suddenly there came again to her mind all that Nurse Freeman had said about his hatred of falsehood, and that she really believed he would not even forgive one of his

own children if he found they had told an untruth; and then she thought of the red ink, and of Sally, and of the tulips, and little Fairy, and many and many another instance when she had not kept strictly to truth;—all came again to her recollection as if all had only happened the day before. She thought of the great and terrible Judgment-Day, and she burst into tears.

“ You had better go to bed, Helen,” said Miss White,—her voice was grave, but kind, for she saw how unhappy the little girl was,—“ I will take you, my dear.”

Helen took the hand which was held out out towards her. Miss White led her upstairs, and kindly put her to bed. She guessed that Helen would rather not be seen by Martha; and then she left the room.

A little while after, the door softly opened, and Mrs. Thornton came to her bedside.

“ Are you awake, Helen?” she gently asked.

“ Yes, Aunt Eleanor.”

“ I am come to tell you that Willy is going on well; he is, I am thankful to say, quite safe and danger.”

" Oh, thank you—thank you, dear Aunt Eleanor !"

" Good night, Helen ; I will talk to you to-morrow."

" Good night, Aunt Eleanor."

Her aunt left the room, and Helen turned round and buried her face in her pillow. Mary presently came to bed. She had been sitting in her mother's dressing-room all the evening, where there was a good fire, that she might have a little change of air.

Helen took no notice when she came into the room, and Mary, thinking she was asleep, with her usual consideration, undressed and got into bed as quickly and as quietly as she could, and was soon fast asleep herself.

Then, in the darkness and stillness of the night, Helen thought over all her past conduct. Many more tears did she shed ; but she did better than shed tears, for she determined she would tell her aunt Eleanor everything that was upon her conscience the very next day ; that she would confess the untruth about the red ink, and her equivocation about the tulips ; and how often, since

then, she had given way to little deceits and falsehoods. After she had made this resolution, Helen felt less unhappy, and fell asleep, for she was very, very weary.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning came. Helen awoke, feeling as if there was something very painful which had happened—as if there was something very hard and disagreeable for her to do; and then, as she became more and more awake, she remembered all that had taken place the day before, and the determination she had made in the night.

It is not an easy task to turn good all at once. It is only by great difficulty that we can get into the right road again when once we have left it; and sometimes it seems so hard, that we feel tempted to shut our eyes to the wrong we have begun to see, and to run back again to our former courses. Many, unhappily, do this, and then "their state is worse than at first."

Helen felt this now, when she thought how very dreadful it would be to have to tell Aunt Eleanor *all* ! And she felt much tempted to say nothing about the red ink and the tulips, as the old excuses rose to her mind, and the old thought, "that no one would ever find it out," and "what was the good?"

But she happily did not give way to the temptation. Willy's danger had made too deep an impression upon her, and she got up and finished dressing, still determined to tell all ! And before this determination could have time to waver again, her aunt sent for her to come to her room.

Helen obeyed immediately, but she felt very, very much afraid.

Mrs. Thornton was in bed. She had sat up all night with Willy again, and she was very tired. Now he had fallen into a sweet sleep, and she came to get a little rest ; but before she did so, she sent for Helen, for she wished to lose no time in speaking to her.

Helen came into the room ; and when her aunt called her by her name, she crept

timidly to her bedside, her eyes fixed upon the ground, for she dared not look up.

And then Mrs. Thornton talked so gravely, but so kindly, for she saw how true was Helen's repentance. She told her how shocking had been her conduct, and how terrible might have been the results.

"And if your little cousin had died," she said, "I think, my dear, you could never have been happy again."

"Oh, no, no, Aunt Eleanor!" sobbed Helen. "And never, never will I tell an untruth again!"

"Yes, Helen, I trust, indeed, that I may believe you; and that as this was your first, so it will be your last falsehood," replied Mrs. Thornton.

"Oh, Aunt Eleanor!" said Helen, "I have been a very, very naughty girl—much more naughty than you think!" And she hid her face in the bed-clothes.

"What do you mean, my dear Helen?" asked Mrs. Thornton, very much surprised.



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"Oh, I want to tell you all—all!" sobbed Helen. "Oh, Aunt Eleanor, do not give over loving me for ever—pray, pray don't!"

"If you have done wrong, my dear, you are now doing the first thing in your power to amend that wrong, by repenting it and confessing it. Tell me everything, and do not think I will cease to love you."

Helen, with many tears, and in a voice interrupted with sobs, now told her aunt all that was upon her conscience.

When she had finished telling about the red ink, there was silence for a little time. Mrs. Thornton felt sadly grieved, and it was in a very grave voice that she said,

"That was the worst of all, Helen! The consequences were not so severe as they might have been this last time, but your conduct was far worse, for you let an innocent person bear your blame, and allowed her to be punished unjustly."

There was silence for some little time, and then Helen said, lifting up her face from the bed, her eyes streaming with tears,

"Is there anything I can do, Aunt Eleanor?"

"Yes, my dear, there is one thing you can do, but it will be very painful. You must go to Sally's mother, and say her daughter was innocent, for that *you* threw over the ink."

"Oh, Aunt Eleanor," cried Helen, "must I do that? It is so long ago now."

"Whose fault is it that it *is* so long ago?" asked Mrs. Thornton.

Helen made no reply, and Mrs. Thornton continued: "And you must write to Sally herself, and beg her to forgive you the injury you have done her. It might have ruined her for life, Helen!"

"Oh, Aunt Eleanor, it will be so dreadful to do that!—to tell all! Oh, what will they think!"

"Oh, my dear child, if you dread so much the bad opinion and the blame of your fellow-creatures, how could you dare to meet the eye of your heavenly Father? And that Eye was upon you all through, Helen,—as it is upon each of us, little as we think of it."

Much more did Mrs. Thornton say upon this solemn subject, till Helen felt more strongly than ever the guiltiness of her conduct; and then, when her aunt saw how she was bowed down by sorrow, she reminded her of all the gracious promises of forgiveness held out to those who repent and amend, and she drew the weeping child to her side, and tenderly kissed her; and Helen felt comforted.

Before she sent Helen from her room, Mrs. Thornton told her that, not ten minutes after she had confessed about Willy's fall, Mr. Thornton came to her in a great hurry, to say that John the groom had just been to tell him that he had found the donkey tied near the garden front-door with the saddle turned; and that when he had taken the donkey round to the stables, he found that one of the girth buckles was broken. He had not said anything of it to any of the servants, as he went straight from the stables to his own house at the lodge to his supper, as it was rather late when he had finished his work. But that the next day his

children had been out blackberrying in the little copse, and that they found Willy's basket in the park, and the girth buckle a little way further on. They would not have seen this buckle, very likely, if it had not been that they were stooping about picking up a quantity of beautiful blackberries which lay scattered about. All this had struck John as curious, and, bringing back the basket to the house in the afternoon, he mentioned where it had been found, and about the donkey's saddle. Martha, who was passing through the kitchen at the time, heard what he was talking about, and knowing what the doctor had said, she immediately went to Mr. Thornton, who had just come in, and told him. Mr. Thornton directly guessed the whole truth, and ran upstairs to Mrs. Thornton to tell her. She had, however, upon Helen's confession, already sent off for the doctor to bleed Willy.

"So you see, Helen, it would all have been found out, even if you had not told me yourself; but it would have been found out too late! The doctor told me that if I had sent

for him five minutes later, he should have been from home, and would not have returned for some hours—and then it would have been too late to have saved Willy !”

I need hardly say that Helen did not let that day pass without writing to Sally, and seeing Mrs. Jenkins.

Poor Mrs. Jenkins seemed more grateful to Helen for telling the truth now, than indignant at her having concealed it so long.

“ I knew my Sally had not done it all along !” she said to her husband, when she told him that evening all that had happened ; “ I knew it all along, and I always said so ! but to be sure, how pretty of Miss Helen to come and tell me—after so long, too ! Bless her !”

“ Humph,” growled her husband ; “ it would have been prettier if she had told at the time, to my mind ! It might have been the undoing of our Sall !”

“ Well, let bygones be bygones, Joe !” said his wife ; “ the young lady will never tell another untruth as long as she lives, take my word for it.”

“ I’d rather take it nor hers !” sneered he.

It is only the very, very kind who will believe directly in the amendment of those who repent. Distrust is one of the punishments which they who do wrong must bear, particularly when the fault is that of want of truth.

And this Helen found. She never, never did tell an untruth again as long as she lived, but for many, many months had she to bear the pain of seeing that her word was not *quite* trusted, when there arose any question about a fact. It was not from her kind aunt Eleanor, it was not from Mary, that she had to bear this want of trust, but from Mrs. Freeman, and Martha, and—worse than all—from her uncle.

Helen bore it humbly and patiently,—for she knew it was the punishment she deserved. But she lived to see the day when her word was as fully believed by Mr. Thornton as that of any of even his own children.



